



**NCSEHE**

National Centre for Student  
Equity in Higher Education



**Curtin University**

# INFORMING POLICY AND PRACTICE III

2016 Student Equity in Higher Education  
Research Grants Program Projects

**Make tomorrow better.**



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Equity in Higher Education



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# Informing Policy and Practice III

2016 Student Equity in Higher Education Research Grants Program Projects

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The full reports are available on the web at [ncsehe.edu.au](http://ncsehe.edu.au)

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# Contents

<b>Foreword</b> .....	<b>4</b>
<b>Preface</b> .....	<b>5</b>
Overview .....	5
Research: Identifying Challenges, Finding Solutions .....	5
Leadership: Creating Change, Inspiring Others .....	8
In Perspective.....	10
<b>Access to Higher Education: Does Distance Impact Students' Intentions to Attend University?</b> .....	<b>11</b>
Expert Commentary: Norma Jeffery .....	12
<b>Factors Influencing University Student Satisfaction, Dropout and Academic Performance: An Australian Higher Education Equity Perspective</b> .....	<b>14</b>
Expert Commentary: Michael Dockery.....	16
<b>Indigenous Achievement in Higher Education and the Role of Self-Efficacy: Rippling Stories of Success</b> .....	<b>17</b>
Expert Commentary: Maria Raciti .....	18
<b>Identifying Strategies for Improving VET to Higher Education Transitions for Indigenous Learners</b> .....	<b>20</b>
Expert Commentary: Peter Noonan.....	22
<b>Regional Student Participation and Migration: Analysis of Factors Influencing Regional Student Participation and Internal Migration in Australian Higher Education</b> .....	<b>23</b>
Expert Commentary: Paul Koshy.....	25
<b>Mentoring Programs and Equity Groups: The Australian Story</b> .....	<b>27</b>
Expert Commentary: Ann Stewart .....	29
<b>It's About Time: Working towards More Equitable Understandings of the Impact of Time for Students in Higher Education</b> .....	<b>30</b>
Expert Commentary: Lisa Andrewartha .....	31
<b>WIL Wellbeing: Exploring Impacts of Unpaid Practicum on Student Wellbeing</b> .....	<b>33</b>
Expert Commentary: Robyn Quin .....	34
<b>School Experiences, Career Guidance, and the University Participation of Young People from Three Equity Groups in Australia</b> .....	<b>36</b>
Expert Commentary: Andrew Norton .....	37
<b>Understanding the Completion Patterns of Equity Students in Regional Universities</b> .....	<b>39</b>
Expert Commentary: Andrew Harvey.....	41
<b>Opportunity through Online Learning: Improving Student Access, Participation and Success in Higher Education</b> .....	<b>42</b>
Expert Commentary: Marcia Devlin .....	44
<b>Fair Connection to Professional Careers: Understanding Social Difference and Disadvantage, Institutional Dynamics and Technological Opportunities</b> .....	<b>45</b>
Expert Commentary: Sarah O'Shea .....	46
<b>The Australian Student Equity Program and Institutional Change: Paradigm Shift or Business as Usual?</b> .....	<b>48</b>
Expert Commentary: Brenda Cherednichenko.....	51
<b>Biographies</b> .....	<b>52</b>
NCSEHE Contributors .....	52
Researchers and Report Authors .....	52
Expert Reviewers .....	59
<b>About the Centre</b> .....	<b>63</b>
<b>Disclaimer</b> .....	<b>64</b>

# Foreword

## Professor Sue Trinidad and Professor John Phillimore — NCSEHE Program Leaders

Research by the National Centre for Student Equity in Higher Education (NCSEHE) in this third publication of the series *Informing Policy and Practice* continues to contribute to a solid evidence base and inform our discussions about how student equity policy and programs should be developed. The research confirms that there is more to be done to ensure that capable people from disadvantaged backgrounds are not prevented from accessing and completing higher education.

The NCSEHE's competitive research program investigates the circumstances in which the educational futures of students from disadvantaged backgrounds unfold. Over the three funding rounds held so far, in 2014, 2015 and 2016, 1.4 million dollars has been made available by the NCSEHE for 34 research projects undertaken by Australian universities and other research organisations, demonstrating how we can improve participation and success in higher education.

We know from the research that promoting access to education, particularly for students from disadvantaged backgrounds, transforms the lives of individuals by providing access to opportunities that would not otherwise eventuate. Over the longer term, investment in equity also improves prospects for the extended families and communities of equity students as others seek to emulate their success.

The benefits of supporting equity in higher education are tangible and considerable, even though in many cases longer time periods are needed to quantify all of the positive economic and social impacts.

The latest 10 research projects funded by the NCSEHE in 2016 provide insights into equity groups and/or equity issues in Australian higher education. In adding to our knowledge of the barriers and challenges to accessing and successfully completing higher education, the reports provide recommendations for policy makers and equity practitioners to create an environment more conducive to promoting equity across the higher education sector.

This year, for the first time in the *Informing Policy and Practice* series, the excellent work of the Equity Fellows Program is featured with an overview of the projects undertaken by the three inaugural 2016 Equity Fellows. The Equity Fellows Program supports high-profile leadership projects, targeted sector-wide, with the goal of improving access, participation and success in higher education for students from disadvantaged backgrounds. Importantly, the Fellows spend time working in, and with, the Australian Government Department of Education and Training, facilitating mutually beneficial engagement between researchers, policy makers and equity practitioners.

The three inaugural Fellows are Dr Nadine Zacharias, Dr Erica Southgate and Dr Cathy Stone who undertook their year-long Fellowship programs in 2016. Their work will have a direct impact on education policy in Australia. Profiles of the Fellows and overviews of their important projects are provided in this report. Three more Equity Fellows have been awarded Fellowships for 2017 and we look forward to their work, adding to the leadership being developed in the equity sector across Australia.

Collectively, this research continues to bring evidence-based investigation to the development of equity policy and practice which will secure more opportunities for people from disadvantaged backgrounds and contribute to a better and fairer society.

We are proud to collate and promote this next series of reports and sincerely thank everyone for their efforts, as research accessed through NCSEHE is used to inform policy and practice to support equity students in their endeavours to complete higher education.



# Preface

**Mr Paul Farnhill — Policy Analyst**

## Overview

Considerable progress has been made over the last 20 years in addressing equity in higher education. There is more social and cultural diversity, while representation of students from disadvantaged backgrounds has generally moved towards being more proportionate to their representation in the population as a whole.

The benefits from a major expansion and reshaping of higher education in Australia have been immense—for individuals, communities, and Australian society and the economy as a whole—but the continuation of these generally positive trends is not guaranteed.

In recent years, there has been a slowing in the growth rate of equity group participation in higher education and, in some cases, a flattening in participation levels. For a range of complex reasons, it may be that incremental improvements in participation rates are increasingly difficult to achieve as they approach target levels. While there may even be a tendency to question the validity of a commitment to equity in challenging times, the case for equity is in fact more compelling than ever.

As developed countries move towards a knowledge economy in which technology and innovation are drivers of economic and social change, it becomes imperative to have a highly skilled and educated population that is technologically-literate right across society as producers, consumers and citizens. Equity is central to facilitating an advanced economy and the social mobility that is a feature of it.

We need to reimagine education and its role in society as we move into a world of technology-driven disruption in jobs, industries and markets, and reconsider changing relationships — between employers and education; between the Vocational Education and Training (VET) sector and universities; and between generic and occupation-specific work skills. For that to happen, we need a consensus on the future of education and the role of equity as a driver of progress. This requires an evidence-based approach to supporting equity, transparency about how we measure equity and success and a willingness to collaborate among all stakeholders.

Research and leadership are two considerations that are critical to achieving a progressive education sector in which equity plays a central role. These form the two themes in this year's *Informing Policy and Practice*.

The first section of the publication examines 10 research reports, funded in 2016 by the NCSEHE, which collectively inform policy and practice to maximise the access, transition and successful completion of university by students from disadvantaged backgrounds.

The second section focuses on examples of leadership in equity by introducing overviews of the Equity Fellows Program. The Program is funded by the Higher Education Participation and Partnerships Program (HEPPP) and is one of its many recent successes. The Equity Fellows Program, administered by the NCSEHE, supports some of Australia's leading researchers to undertake strategic, high-impact, high-profile sector-wide leadership projects that improve access, participation and success in higher education for students from disadvantaged backgrounds.

## Research: Identifying Challenges, Finding Solutions

This year's crop of 10 NCSEHE-sponsored research reports continues to highlight the importance of quality research in three aspects of improving equity in higher education:

improving access and participation; developing effective partnerships; and informing policy and practice in equity issues and program development.

Research is fundamental to understanding the changing trends and issues in equity. As economic and social change unfold across society, the barriers and enablers for equity change. Policy makers and practitioners need to respond to the subtle changes occurring in equity if they are to provide the best policy and practice environments to support students from disadvantaged backgrounds. Importantly, we also need to be more networked around equity by sharing information and insights, and ensure that those feed into policy-making processes in and across government and educational institutions.

This year's research reports facilitate an evidence-based shift towards equity support policies and programs that makes both more effective and efficient and, in turn, means better outcomes for equity students as well as a more optimal use of public expenditure.

The 2016 research reports provide information and insights into a range of topical and sometimes contentious issues. This year's reports can be categorised into four broad areas: enabling and transitional support; supporting students from regional and remote areas; supporting Indigenous students; and a fresh look at how equity students as a whole can be assisted.

### **Enabling and Transitional Support**

One of the established themes is providing support to students from disadvantaged backgrounds at strategic intervention points when they transition from one institution to another, or at stages in an educational pathway. These intervention points include the transition from senior school to higher education; transitional support through higher education; and transitional support from higher education to employment. While the economic and social circumstances behind these challenges change over time, the need for fresh research into how students cope with transitional change is a constant theme for equity.

Three reports examined enabling and transitional support structures and programs.

*School Experiences, Career Guidance, and the University Participation of Young People from Three Equity Groups in Australia*, led by Dr Wojtek Tomaszewski from the University of Queensland, found that school experiences and career advice services at secondary schools have strong positive shaping influences on students from disadvantaged backgrounds, and that early interventions at secondary school are particularly important in shaping student intentions. The report provided insights and recommendations for policy and practice likely to facilitate the successful transition of students from disadvantaged backgrounds into higher education.

*Mentoring Programs and Equity Groups: The Australian Story*, led by Associate Professor Susan Beltman from Curtin University, analysed the role, uses and further potential for mentoring as a vehicle for supporting disadvantaged students. The research mapped the extent to which mentoring programs are used in Australian universities for students at three stages: enabling, engagement and employment, and tested them against best practice in mentoring guidelines and benchmarks. The report assessed which mentoring programs include or target equity groups to support such students and assessed how Australian mentoring programs for equity groups align with existing evidence-based benchmarks. The project made recommendations for institutions to better develop and use mentoring to more effectively support equity students in higher education.

*WIL Wellbeing: Exploring the Impacts of Unpaid Practicum on Student Wellbeing*, led by Dr Deanna Grant-Smith from Queensland University of Technology, examined the impact of Work Integrated Learning (WIL) placements on university students. There is increasing pressure to support graduates in developing practical work skills as they transition from

university into professional work through WIL programs, but there has been very limited exploration of student experiences of WIL from a wellbeing or equity perspective. The report highlighted sources of financial stress for WIL participants; it showed how WIL workplaces can better prepare and support student wellbeing and outcomes; and it revealed how institutional and community support can assist WIL participants. The practical focus of findings will assist universities, WIL employers and the students engaged in such programs.

### **Supporting Students from Regional and Remote Communities**

The main challenges for regional and remote students continue to revolve around developing positive narratives, the extra cost of living burdens they face, and the psychological dislocation of leaving home. The proportion of students from regional and remote areas at Australian universities has shown a slight decline in recent years, though the reasons for this are not clear. This year's research reports revealed new insights into the complexity of the drivers of participation in higher education of students from regional areas which will assist policy makers and practitioners to achieve better outcomes for regional students in future.

*Regional Student Participation and Migration*, led by Associate Professor Buly Cardak from La Trobe University, unravelled some of the complexities behind trends in higher education participation among students from regional and remote areas. The report proposed that while regional students are underrepresented in higher education, their true level of access may be higher than that reported due to the way in which regional and remote students are classified. The number of regional students who move to the city has grown at a faster rate than the number choosing to undertake study in regional areas, a finding that has implications for the design of incentives that support regional delivery and regional student relocation.

*Access to Higher Education: Does Distance Impact Students' Intentions to Attend University?*, led by Dr Grant Cooper from RMIT University, sought to ascertain whether distance is related to a student's intention to study at university, unrelated to other factors. The research team developed a new model variable to test out the hypothesis — the Nearest University Measure (NUM). Distance was found to be an important factor in determining the choices of students in whether to attend university. The NUM provides the opportunity to fine-tune analysis of the factors shaping student decisions which are influenced by access to the range of services available within centres of different sizes. The research may inform understanding of how geographical location impacts on access to education.

*Understanding the Completion Patterns of Equity Students in Regional Universities*, led by Professor Karen Nelson from the University of the Sunshine Coast, unravelled the complexities behind regional equity students' university completion rates. In addition to clarifying the nature of the many factors that shape disadvantage, the report analysed the effect of compounding factors, providing particular insights for policy and practice in this challenging area of equity in higher education.

### **Supporting Indigenous Students**

An increasing number of Indigenous people are entering higher education, but this equity group is consistently underrepresented in higher education. They are less likely to get to university, less likely to complete university, less likely to be employed soon after graduating and more likely to receive lower incomes from employment. On the positive side, we're 'closing the gap' — but are we closing it fast enough, and can we do better?

Many reports into Indigenous education focus on challenges and barriers, but the two reports from the 2016 NCSEHE research took a much more positive perspective, producing encouraging lessons for policy and practice.

*Indigenous Achievement in Higher Education and the Role of Self-Efficacy: Rippling Stories of Success*, led by Dr Jack Frawley from Charles Darwin University, examined numerous success stories and illustrated how one student's success can encourage others to follow suit. The report illustrates that building narratives of self-efficacy is crucial to creating the self-belief that drives individuals to succeed. The research project analysed the role that self-efficacy played for Indigenous students in educational success, and how institutions can better support the development of a strong sense of self-efficacy among Indigenous students. The range of findings and recommendations will help educational institutions better support Indigenous students.

*Identifying Strategies for Promoting VET to Higher Education Transitions for Indigenous Learners*, led by Associate Professor James Smith from Charles Darwin University, explored the possibilities for developing transitions from Vocational Education and Training (VET) to university for Indigenous students. More Indigenous students enrol in VET than university, but only 4.9 per cent of Indigenous students make the transition between the two, suggesting the potential to develop this pathway. The project found that enabling pathways are often complex and difficult to navigate, and that differences in curriculums, teaching methods and methods of assessment also made for problematic transitions. However, dual sector institutions are well positioned to become an effective pathway for Indigenous students if they build partnerships with industries, engage with communities and provide streamlined movement between the two sectors.

### **Support for Equity Students in all Groups**

There are some issues that affect all equity students and these need to be further researched, analysed and addressed across all cohorts of students from disadvantaged backgrounds.

*Factors Influencing Student Satisfaction, Dropout and Academic Performance: An Australian Higher Education Equity Perspective*, led by Dr Ian Li from the University of Western Australia, examined the determinants of student satisfaction in Australian higher education with a focus on students in different equity groups. While the study revealed that there were only modest differences in student satisfaction between equity students and their non-disadvantaged counterparts, students from most equity groups were found to have larger probabilities of being at risk of dropout, led by Indigenous students, students with disability, and regional students. The reasons why students considered leaving university were led by financial reasons, health reasons and disposition towards study. The report provided lessons for policy and program makers.

*It's About Time: Working towards More Equitable Understandings of the Impact of Time for Students in Higher Education*, led by Professor Penny Jane Burke from the University of Newcastle, analysed equity through the perspective of how we see, are shaped by, and manage time. The report illustrated how some students have to juggle time through multiple roles and jobs which can lead to numerous stresses, and these accumulate into a collective hidden disadvantage that can unintentionally discriminate against some equity students.

The report informed recommendations for achieving a balance between structured and flexible time by taking different approaches to teaching, online resources, accommodation and travel options and improving communication with students.

### **Leadership: Creating Change, Inspiring Others**

A second theme in this year's publication focuses on the importance of leadership. The case for equity in higher education frequently gets lost between high-level education policy issues that shape equity but can seem detached from it, and detailed lower-profile operational issues of equity that can be lost on a wider audience.



Leadership and effective communication are critical in bringing together fragmented messages, and creating a widely understood national narrative on the importance of equity. This narrative must be reinforced by strategic policies, developed through the dissemination of detailed research.

### **The NCSEHE Equity Fellows Program**

The Equity Fellows Program was established to take equity forward in a strategic way by promoting work on complex, practical research programs, focused on securing policy changes at the highest levels which work their way through the education sector to secure positive outcomes for equity.

The projects are targeted, sector-wide, and aimed at improving access, participation and success in higher education for students from disadvantaged backgrounds. As part of the program, Fellows spend a period of time working in, and with, the Department of Education and Training, facilitating mutually beneficial collaborative engagement between government and the education sector.

In addition to producing policy-changing outcomes, the Equity Fellows act as an inspiration to the many equity policy makers and equity practitioners who are encouraged to lift their horizons and aspirations even further.

The first three Equity Fellows have completed their ambitious projects which illustrate the depth of their ability as well as significant findings for policy development in equity.

*The Australian Student Equity Program and Institutional Change: Paradigm Shift or Business as Usual?*, by Dr Nadine Zacharias from Deakin University, examined how the HEPPP initiative had been implemented by universities and whether it had met government aspirations for achieving equity. The report is the first comprehensive analysis of HEPPP which is arguably the single most important shaper of equity in higher education.

The report featured five related components including an analysis of HEPPP reports, three institutional case studies and an engagement strategy with key stakeholders. To help analysts assess the performance of HEPPP as an instrument of change, the Fellowship produced a set of diagnostic tools, an interpretative model, and an *Equity Initiatives Map* to enable analyses of HEPPP program design and implementation to assist institutional equity strategy and performance.

The report produced three sets of recommendations—for policy makers, for the higher education sector, and for future research—all of which may significantly inform systemic change in policy and practice in equity in Australia.

*Opportunity Through Online Learning: Improving Student Access, Participation and Success in Higher Education*, by Dr Cathy Stone from the University of Newcastle, produced a systemic analysis of online education, an area that is assuming greater importance and which promises to deliver greater benefits, one of which is more flexible support for equity students.

Based on analysis of 15 Australian institutions plus the Open University in the United Kingdom, the Fellowship produced some critical insights in how online education can systemically be employed to support all students. These insights may change the way that many people see online education and, given the rate of progress in innovation and technology in education, make a significant contribution to the future of higher education.

The adoption and implementation of ideas is facilitated by the provision of national guidelines in 10 areas for the development of online learning.

*Fair Connection to Professional Careers: Understanding Social Difference and Disadvantage, Institutional Dynamics and Technological Opportunities*, by Dr Erica Southgate from the University of Newcastle, examined the reasons why many equity students were still facing major barriers to success, particularly in gaining entry to elite institutions and prestigious courses.

The Fellowship took a radical approach, engaging in some 'blue sky dreaming' in investigating how to develop aspirations and self-belief in the ability to 'do anything' and to facilitate change in the pathways to realising dreams.

The Fellowship had three related components: an analysis of the stories behind students from disadvantaged backgrounds by mining data on aspirations from two large studies; a national scoping of barriers and enablers to high-status professions through interviewing some experts in the field; and the development of a road map to access and develop digital technologies and their potential application for high school students in their career explorations.

The project broke ground in three discrete areas, linking them together to identify pathways for disadvantaged students to connect distant aspirations to success in high-status careers. In this way, the Fellowship presents a bold perspective in supporting equity initiatives for the disadvantaged.

## In Perspective

There is little doubt that the case for equity in higher education is socially compelling and becoming a strategic imperative for a knowledge-based society of the future.

As social, economic and technological change quicken, equity policy and the support programs that underpin it need to respond quickly, or even anticipate, the changing needs of students from disadvantaged backgrounds. The best way we can do this is by closing the gap between equity policy, research and practice by creating positive feedback loops from engaged and collaborative networks in a self-reinforcing cycle.

Research into changing trends, issues and challenges, from which strong findings and recommendations emerge to inform policy makers and practitioners, is fundamental.

Communicating best practice policies and programs in a 'competitive collaborative' institutional setting in which universities compete to provide best practice initiatives, but do so in a transparent and collaborative model, is a constructive process to achieve equity goals and support students from disadvantaged backgrounds.

Leadership in developing significant initiatives of national importance is also crucial in developing the institutional reform settings that can facilitate a constant unfolding of change in policies and programs that will promote equity in higher education and create a fairer and more productive society.

# Access to Higher Education: Does Distance Impact Students' Intentions to Attend University?

Grant Cooper, James Baglin and Rob Strathdee

RMIT University

## Low SES Regional

Data analysis indicates distance is a predictor of students' intentions to attend university, net of selected demographic and socioeconomic variables. This report applied statistical modelling and geo-mapping to existing data, contributing to current literature as well as indicating an ongoing advancement from discrete categorisation to continuous measures of students' distance from higher education providers.

## Background

We know geography matters in relation to participation in higher education. Both the 2008 *Bradley Review of Higher Education* and the 2010 *Inquiry into the Extent and Nature of Disadvantage and Inequity in Rural and Regional Victoria*, observed that regional students were underrepresented in higher education when compared to their metropolitan peers. Indeed, data from the Department of Education Employment and Workplace Relations in 2010 showed that the participation rates of students from regional and remote areas actually deteriorated between 2005 and 2010.

While we know that geography is linked to disadvantage, we do not fully understand the processes through which this disadvantage arises. The reasons for the differences in participation highlighted in both the Bradley review and the Victorian Parliamentary inquiry varied, pointing to a complexity of factors, operating in interconnected ways. Context is critical. For example, Alloway and Dalley-Trim reported that while youth living in regional areas were commonly interested in pursuing higher education following completion of secondary school, barriers to participation limited their propensity to act on this interest. The barriers included attachment to home, desire to remain close to family and friends and the cost of studying away from home. In a similar refrain, Marks et al. found attitudes, motivations and aspirations were as important influences in the decision to attend university. These non-cognitive dispositions towards participating in university are developed and influenced by local social and cultural networks and values.

In part, the lower aspirations that were identified in some of the research as a barrier to participation could be a result of regional and remote students (and/or their teachers) understanding the difficulties they faced attending higher education and, as a result, lowering their expectations of achievement. Whatever the case, the evidence was conclusive: students living in regional and remote areas performed less well in secondary education and, even after accounting for this lower success in school, they were less likely to progress to university than their metropolitan peers.

## Objectives

This report aimed to assess if geographical location and other background factors linked to achievement, such as socioeconomic status (SES) predicted students' intentions to enrol in higher education. The research attempted to answer two key questions:

1. Is distance from a university, net of other factors, a predictor of students' intentions to attend university?
2. What are the implications of this study in relation to policies regarding the presence of regional universities in Australia?

## Methodology

The research involved two distinct phases of analysis:

- Phase One drew upon data gathered in a related project by Cooper using mapping software to create a continuous measure (for example, kilometres) of students' distance from a university as opposed to a relatively limited number of discrete categories (for example, metropolitan; remote).
- Phase Two explored the same issue with the Longitudinal Surveys of Australian Youth (LSAY) data from the 2009 (Yr09) cohort.

## Key Findings and Recommendations

While factors are likely to be complex and interwoven, even when controlling for the effect of SES, this report found geographical location to be a significant predictor of students' intentions to study at university. These findings are consistent with other research, and highlight the ongoing importance of access to universities in regional and remote Australia.

## Conclusions and Considerations for Policy

Increased access to higher education in regional and remote Australia is one component of a multi-faceted approach to tackling the economic, informational, class and geographical barriers that commonly impact students' participation. Universities in regional and remote Australia are uniquely positioned to contribute to the economic, social and cultural fabric of their region.

An important element of improved access includes a regional network of universities that offer a wide range of courses that appeal to students' diverse desires and/or capabilities. Faced with ever tightening budgets, innovative solutions are urgently needed in order to improve access to university education for regional and remote Australians.

Within the ever growing area of geo-mapping techniques, researchers are encouraged to consider variables like the Nearest University Measure (NUM) used in this report. Continuous measures, as opposed to discrete categories, may increase understanding of how factors, such as geographical location, may impact participation and access to education and other services.

While the continuous measures used in Phase One did not significantly predict students' intentions to enrol at university, the high risk of sample bias and a number of statistical issues prevented clear conclusions.

Future research may apply the same techniques used in Phase One on a larger, more representative sample. An ever growing list of geo-mapping techniques and software is enabling new ways for researchers to report and analyse trends, correlations and possible relationships.

## Expert Commentary: Norma Jeffery

**Office of the Deputy Vice Chancellor  
Curtin University**

While underrepresentation of regional and remote students in higher education is well recognised in the equity policies of universities, this report adds to our understanding of the

processes through which this disadvantage arises. By examining in depth the impact of geography on aspiration and readiness to attend university it provides insights into barriers and dispositions caused by distance from metropolitan areas. These include economic, geographic, class and informational barriers as well as lower motivation and aspiration to attend university.

The question: *does distance impact students' intentions to attend university?* is addressed through statistical modelling and re-mapping to existing data. Both linear distance from higher education providers and the usual regional categories are examined.

This report found geographical location to be a significant predictor of students' intentions to study at university while acknowledging the presence of many complex and interwoven factors, even after controlling for the effect of socioeconomic status. Students were less likely to report an intention to study at university the further they were from a metropolitan area.

Another finding notes the importance of improving access to universities in regional and remote Australia; however, this may only be a partial solution as the literature review highlights the compounding of disadvantage throughout schooling in many regional and remote locations. Policy initiatives that commence universities' engagement with students early in secondary schooling may need to be enhanced to increase academic preparedness and participation in the university application process for these students, if there is to be any change.

The challenge for policy developers and funders will be to apply these findings in the context of the diversity, isolation and vast distances and other barriers to providing access in regional and remote Australia. As the report proposes, further research could extend and combine geo-mapping and coding to other measures of disadvantage to analyse possible relationships to enhance understanding of the precise nature of the disadvantage specific to distance and particular locations.

**FULL REPORT:** <https://www.ncsehe.edu.au/publications/access-to-higher-education-does-distance-impact-students-intentions-to-attend-university/>



# Factors Influencing University Student Satisfaction, Dropout and Academic Performance: An Australian Higher Education Equity Perspective

*Ian Li and David Carroll*

The University of Western Australia

**Disability**  
**First in Family**  
**Indigenous**  
**International**  
**Low SES**  
**Regional**

Equity groups have increasing access to higher education enrolment, but factors including health, finance and disposition towards study can contribute to the decision of disadvantaged students to drop out of university study. This study looks at the determinants of student satisfaction and academic outcomes at university, with a focus on equity group differences.

## Background

The 2008 Bradley *Review of Higher Education* identified the need to better support access and participation of disadvantaged individuals in higher education, with the aim of improving their socioeconomic outcomes through the provision and attainment of university study. The recommendations of the Bradley review have had bipartisan support and have led to a number of initiatives within the higher education sector aimed at achieving the targets set out in the review.

Over the past decade, participation in higher education by Australians from disadvantaged groups has been increasing. However, their degree completion rates still lag behind those of their fellow students from more privileged backgrounds. It was thus of interest to explore the differences in university academic outcomes for students from disadvantaged backgrounds, as well as the determinants of those differences. In addition, it was of interest to examine whether there were differences in student experience at university for disadvantaged groups, and how student experience contributes to academic outcomes.

## Objectives

This study investigated the determinants of student satisfaction in Australian higher education, with a focus on students in various equity groups. Furthermore, the study examined the determinants of three key academic outcomes:

- being at risk of dropout
- actual dropout from university studies
- academic performance, as measured by students' Weighted Average Marks (WAM).

## Methodology

This study was based on data from the national University Experience Survey (UES), supplemented with demographic and enrolment data from the Higher Education Information Management System (HEIMS), and WAM data from 13 participating universities. The study

examined seven equity groups: Indigenous; students from Non-English Speaking Backgrounds (NESB); students with disability; women in science, technology, engineering and mathematics (STEM); low socioeconomic status (SES); regional and remote; and First in Family (FiF). The UES measures five facets of the higher education student experience:

- engagement with learning at their institution
- satisfaction with the quality of teaching they have experienced
- satisfaction with the learning resources provided by their institution
- satisfaction with the support they received at their institution
- satisfaction with the skills development they experienced through their studies.

In addition to the items asking students to rate their levels of engagement and satisfaction with different aspects of their university experience, students were also asked to indicate whether they had seriously considered leaving their university in the year the survey was administered. Actual dropout from higher education was also examined, using data sourced from the HEIMS. Course WAM data from 13 participating institutions were also analysed, in order to examine the academic performance of disadvantaged university students. Logistic regression models were estimated in the models of 'at-risk' of dropout and actual dropout, while linear regression models were estimated in the models of academic marks.

## Key Findings and Recommendations

The results of this study suggested that equity students in Australia were generally well supported at university and were satisfied with most aspects of their educational experience. However, students from non-English speaking backgrounds or who have a disability were found to have lower levels of student satisfaction across most dimensions.

Equity group membership was not found to be associated with an increased likelihood of considering leaving university in the short term. However, students from most of the equity groups, particularly students who identified as Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander, who had disabilities or who were from regional or remote locations, were more likely to consider leaving university than non-equity students. Financial and health reasons were identified as strong drivers of these students' consideration of leaving university while, at the same time, the disposition of equity group students towards university study reduced their likelihood of considering leaving university relative to non-equity students.

The models of actual dropout behaviour showed that students from equity groups were not statistically different from non-equity group students in terms of the likelihood of dropping out, although being at risk of dropping out (i.e. considering leaving university) was a significant predictor of actual dropout, particularly for commencing students. Equity group students were also shown to perform less well academically, relative to their counterparts. At the same time, academic performance was also shown to be an important influence on university dropout — academically weaker students were more likely to drop out from university study.

## Conclusions and Considerations for Policy

The findings of this study indicate a strong need to provide support to students from equity groups from an early stage of their access and participation in university studies. The results from the various analyses all indicated stronger equity effects for commencing students as opposed to students at a later stage of their studies. This itself is likely attributable, at least partially, to especially vulnerable students dropping out relatively early in their courses; this is all the more justification for providing early support. Finally, it should be recognised that there could be a need for support for equity students from beyond the higher education sector, particularly in the areas of financial support and health, in order to level the odds for such students to successfully graduate from university.

## Expert Commentary: Michael Dockery

**Associate Professor  
Curtin University**

It is fair to say that policies and programs to increase the participation of equity groups in higher education are of little value if those students do not find university to be a rewarding experience, both economically and in terms personal fulfilment. While achievement against targets for participation are typically the headline indicators of progress, ongoing research exploring and monitoring the latter part of this equation is essential. The NCSEHE has been leading the charge in this area in recent years, with commissioned research looking at retention and success at university and in post-graduation labour market outcomes for a range of equity groups.

The study provides a rich and novel addition to that body of research. Analyses of student satisfaction across different domains facilitate the important distinction between the contributions of academic versus non-academic factors in shaping higher education experiences of equity students and the wider student population. This provides insights into how universities can tailor equity programs to meet the needs of each group. For instance, their evidence demonstrates that support is most needed in the first year of university; and that added financial support is most needed by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander, regional/remote and First in Family students.

The analysis is based on data linked from the UES and the universities' own systems. It is an excellent example of the potential for administrative data and inter-agency linking to provide cost-effective evidence based on large samples for informing policy and practice. Lead author Li has been pioneering in his efforts to overcome institutionalised resistance to making such data available to researchers. That determination is evident again in this study, with 40 universities approached and 13 agreeing to provide data.

**FULL REPORT:** <https://www.ncsehe.edu.au/publications/factors-influencing-university-student-satisfaction-dropout-and-academic-performance-an-australian-higher-education-equity-perspective/>

# Indigenous Achievement in Higher Education and the Role of Self-Efficacy: Rippling Stories of Success

Jack Frawley, Robyn Ober, Millie Olcay and James A. Smith

Charles Darwin University  
Batchelor Institute

**Indigenous**  
**Low SES**  
**Regional**

Indigenous students could be better supported in their transition, participation, retention and success in higher education with an increased emphasis on emotional support. This research recommended the supplementation of existing academic support programs with equity strategies that recognise the importance of community and family engagement, a sense of belonging and identity, and the development of self-efficacy amongst Indigenous students.

## Background

This research originated from the 2015 National Forum on Indigenous pathways and transitions into higher education, hosted by Charles Darwin University (CDU) and funded through the Higher Education Participation and Partnerships Program (HEPPP) by the Australian Government. The forum was an opportunity to launch a national project report led by Steven Kinnane, *Can't be what you can't see: The transition of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students into higher education*. In this report Kinnane et al. viewed success as a 'ripple of many small successes' and identified the vital roles that individual, family and community have for an Indigenous student's successful transition into higher education and for the development and provision of effective targeted pathway programs.

Throughout Australia there have been many 'small successes' of Indigenous individuals who have completed higher education, but these stories are largely absent from the literature. There has, instead, been a strong focus on the barriers and challenges to Indigenous participation.

## Objectives and Methodology

Self-efficacy as a key element of Social Cognitive Theory proposes that learning occurs within a social context. This review compared and contrasted key findings on self-efficacy and academic success, and singled out the most effective approaches in promoting a strong sense of self-efficacy in the higher education context.

Researchers undertook an integrative literature review on self-efficacy and academic success, with a particular focus on Indigenous higher education students, and documented narrative accounts of Indigenous student success in higher education studies by accessing YouTube videos in which students presented their higher education experiences. A data analysis frame was developed, informed by the four sources of self-efficacy: performance accomplishments and academic self-efficacy; vicarious experience; verbal persuasion; and physiological states. An evidence base was generated and the most effective approaches for supporting Indigenous pathways and transitions into higher education and successful completions of studies were documented.

## Key Findings and Recommendations

The results from this research showed that while the self-efficacy sources of vicarious experience and performance accomplishments in determining success were significant, these sources were less important in determining Indigenous student success in higher education than physiological states.

The research also signalled an emerging subset of the latter source, one in which a student's emotional motivation to succeed was in order to give something back to family and the community, and was linked to cultural norms such as the spirit of giving, reciprocity, relationships and responsibility.

The recommendations from this research were:

- Academic support programs are important and would be significantly more effective if they were supplemented by emotional support provided by culturally capable counsellors.
- The provision of culturally safe spaces for students can support wellbeing and a sense of belonging and identity. Where these don't exist within universities, they should be established and adequately funded.
- Equity strategies and initiatives should be based on a foundation of community engagement with families and others who have a role in community-based initiatives.
- Further research would assist in understanding how cultural norms such as the spirit of giving back, reciprocity, relationships and responsibility influence and modify self-efficacy theory.
- Further research aimed at examining self-efficacy in the context of Indigenous student participation in higher education would be useful for advancing existing program investments and supports in this sector.
- Self-efficacy should be a key consideration in programs that aim to support Indigenous students in higher education, such as the Indigenous Student Success Program (ISSP) currently administered by the Department of the Prime Minister and Cabinet. Research findings from this report could be used to provide greater flexibility in program delivery during any further revisions of the current guidelines and implementation process associated with ISSP.

## Conclusions and Considerations for Policy

This research identified several areas for further work especially in regards to policy, practice and research. Providing physical and emotional wellbeing support is largely absent from government policy and initiatives and this needs to be addressed as a matter of priority. The Commonwealth Government could increase support through Indigenous Student Success Program (ISSP) funding as a contribution towards improved educational outcomes for Indigenous higher education students as set out in the goals of the *National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Education Policy* and the recently released *Universities Australia Indigenous Strategy*. Targeted programs focusing on strengthening self-efficacy could include expanded Indigenous student support services provided by universities as well as community outreach programs for Indigenous students from low socioeconomic backgrounds that could be funded through the Higher Education Participation and Partnerships Program (HEPPP) initiative.

### Expert Commentary: Maria Raciti

**Associate Professor, Co-Leader Indigenous Studies Research Theme  
University of the Sunshine Coast**

Frawley, Ober, Olcay and Smith explore the notion of self-efficacy including its various guises and the primary sources from which it can be derived. While the body of literature



pertaining to the role of self-efficacy in student achievement is extensive, Frawley and colleagues reveal that most of this work has been situated in Western contexts. Indeed, there is a dearth of research into the role and the nuances of academic self-efficacy within ethnic minority or Indigenous contexts.

In attending to this notable gap in the literature, the project team brought to light the salient role of physiological states, being one of the primary sources of self-efficacy. Digging deeper, they revealed that emotional support appeared to be the central catalyst. Frawley and colleagues then effectively translate these novel findings into a range of recommendations for universities and the sector.

Beyond the findings, what stands out most about this work is its strengths-based perspective. Unlike much of the research into Indigenous achievement in higher education, the project team have approached the topic from a positive viewpoint. This is both a welcome and refreshing take on the topic of Indigenous academic achievement, celebrating success, be it big or small or however self-defined by Indigenous students. Student voices are quoted throughout and while they are included to primarily serve as evidence of the findings, they also give rise to optimism for those researchers and practitioners who work in this space.

**FULL REPORT:** <https://www.ncsehe.edu.au/publications/indigenous-achievement-in-higher-education-and-the-role-of-self-efficacy-rippling-stories-of-success/>

# Identifying Strategies for Improving VET to Higher Education Transitions for Indigenous Learners

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Indigenous  
Low SES  
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Enhancing Vocational Education and Training (VET) to higher education pathways and transitions for Indigenous students is important. Dual sector universities are well positioned to take the lead in strengthening pathways and transitions for Indigenous students by harnessing the opportunities and addressing the challenges they face. An integrative literature review, focus groups and a survey of staff and students highlighted the need for greater community engagement and partnerships, and enabling programs that develop academic preparedness and the strengthening of self-efficacy in students.

## Background

Indigenous people participate in Australian higher education at significantly lower rates than their non-Indigenous counterparts, are less likely to complete Year 12, and less likely to gain an Australian Tertiary Admission Rank deemed necessary for higher education admission. Indigenous people are more likely to enter higher education later in life and less likely to gain admittance into a university based on their prior educational achievement, while their average rates of completion of higher education courses are at least twice as low as those of their non-Indigenous peers.

More Indigenous students enrol in Vocational Education and Training (VET) which could provide a feasible pathway for Indigenous students into higher education. Yet, transitions and pathways into higher education are often convoluted. Supporting the transition of Indigenous students from VET to higher education promises to increase Indigenous higher education participation, which is particularly crucial for regional and remote Indigenous students who have completed a VET qualification. Unfortunately, VET to higher education pathways are relatively uncommon with only 4.9 per cent of Indigenous students currently making this transition.

## Objectives and Methodology

While enabling programs have received significant recent attention, the potential of the VET to higher education pathways to increase Indigenous higher education participation remains largely unexplored. This project expanded on this gap by moving research beyond the investigation of enabling programs, towards a deeper examination of additional practice-based (and evidence-informed) strategies being developed by dual sector universities in Australia. This project sought to identify practical strategies for enhancing VET to higher education transitions for Australian Indigenous students. The research team achieved this by:

- producing an integrative literature review of relevant national and global scholarship about VET to higher education pathways and transitions for Indigenous learners in Australia
- facilitating focus groups to explore the experiences and perspectives of teaching staff, academics and decision-makers tasked with supporting Indigenous students transitioning or wishing to transition from VET to higher education, successful strategies and challenges of transitions being a central aim of inquiry
- administering a survey of staff and Indigenous students to gauge experiences, intentions and difficulties of VET to higher education pathways.

The research identified potential approaches to enhance systems, policies and practices that dual sector universities can develop and implement to improve the prospects of:

- Indigenous student transition from VET to higher education
- Indigenous student participation in the higher education sector
- more strategically aligned investments to increase Indigenous higher education participation
- improved Indigenous education trajectories and outcomes in Australia.

## Key Findings and Recommendations

The report concluded that there is significant potential to increase VET to higher education transitions among Indigenous students, if supportive tertiary education environments are present. Key factors enabling such supportive environments include:

- targeted outreach and engagement work
- support of a clear vision where pathway options are concerned
- enhanced and well-aligned policies and practice
- additional applied research into the remaining gaps.

## Conclusions and Considerations for Policy

VET to higher education pathways and transitions are a viable pathway option for Indigenous students, but further action is required to support such transitions. The need to facilitate students' post-school transitions by developing student resilience, institutional responsiveness and policy reflexivity through transformative education is required at national and sub-national levels. Dual sector universities are well positioned to take a lead role in strengthening Indigenous pathways and transitions. There is also an urgent need for greater community engagement and partnerships, as well as enabling programs that develop academic preparedness and the strengthening of self-efficacy in students. The review also highlighted significant gaps in research, including:

- the student perspective on transitioning through the tertiary education sector
- learners' actual experiences in their educational journeys
- the educational pathways of students moving between sectors
- whether remoteness from providers and low socioeconomic status act separately, or in concert, as barriers to tertiary participation
- the pathways experience of urban Indigenous students
- gender as a factor within the remoteness context
- the transition from lower-level to higher-level qualifications in the VET sector
- the VET in Schools experiences and outcomes of Indigenous students.

Anecdotally there have been many programs that have supported Indigenous VET to higher education pathways. These have usually been nested in sector-specific programs tailored to Indigenous student needs, most notably in the education sector.

However, there is relatively little information and peer-reviewed evidence about the process, impact and outcome of such programs. Research on these issues will provide a more complete picture in which to inform future investments.

## Expert Commentary: Peter Noonan

**Professor of Tertiary Education Policy  
Mitchell Institute, Victoria University**

This report by Smith et.al. is important and timely, addressing the potential contribution dual sector universities can make to improve transitions by Indigenous learners from VET to higher education.

Participation by Indigenous learners is higher in VET than higher education, but even in VET, participation levels by Indigenous learners are higher in Certificate I and II courses which generally have very low levels of transition into higher education. As school retention rates and schooling outcomes for young Indigenous people are far lower than average, VET offers an important alternative pathway to higher education. It also potentially offers a pathway for older Indigenous learners through programs aimed at preparation for higher education or through credit based pathways for learners upgrading their skills.

The strategies proposed by this report have relevance and application beyond dual sector universities, however it is dual sector universities that are uniquely placed to improve transitions to higher education by Indigenous learners if they focus strongly on the 'learner journey' in a culturally relevant environment with continuity in learner support, mentoring, well designed scholarships and work placement, and progression with other Indigenous learners.

Dual sector universities can also do much to redress the fractured nature of broader VET and higher education relationships, particularly in pedagogy and qualification design, but only through strong leadership at the institutional level and policies and procedures which engrain collaboration between the sectors as a habit of mind with specific consideration to the needs of Indigenous learners.

**FULL REPORT:** <https://www.ncsehe.edu.au/publications/identifying-strategies-for-improving-vet-to-higher-education-transitions-for-indigenous-learners/>

# Regional Student Participation and Migration: Analysis of Factors Influencing Regional Student Participation and Internal Migration in Australian Higher Education

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**Disability**  
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Australian-first analytic techniques reveal regional student university access is higher than reflected in current statistics. Enrolment growth for students of regional origin is outpacing enrolment growth for all domestic students. Regional students are increasingly migrating to major cities as a result of factors that include demand-driven funding, flexible delivery, income support, and economic opportunity. Regional students remain underrepresented, with school achievement the key factor influencing university participation.

## Background

Regional communities demonstrate persistently lower levels of higher education participation and attainment. Regional underrepresentation is the focal point for a range of policy interventions that seek to increase participation. These include increasing university outreach and engagement with regional communities; increasing the supply of university places available to, and targeted at, regional students; subsidising the costs of delivering higher education in regional communities; and providing financial support to defray the costs of relocation faced by regional students.

There is diverse literature that examines factors influencing regional participation. Whilst the factors influencing regional participation are well documented, there remain significant gaps in our knowledge. There has, until now, been a lack of robust empirical analysis of the relative effects of factors associated with regional student underrepresentation. Our knowledge on regional student participation is also limited by the characteristics of the data used to capture participation levels. Existing indicators confer regional status to students on the basis of their current home address, and can therefore provide limited insights into matters of regional origin, mobility and migration.

## Objectives and Methodology

This study sought to progress our knowledge of regional student participation and mobility through quantitative analysis of:

- factors associated with regional student progression through school and into higher education, using data generated by the Longitudinal Survey of Australian Youth (LSAY)
- factors associated with the migration of students with a commencing regional home address to major cities and other regional areas using customised data obtained from the Department of Education and Training.



## Key Findings and Recommendations

This report covered a wide range of the regional student experience in contemporary Australian higher education. The project contributed to the debate on costs uniquely facing students from regional locations. The findings are positive in that they revealed eligible regional students likely to face credit constraints were no less likely to attend university. Likely credit constrained regional students were found to be more likely to graduate than their peers. Evidence on plans to attend university at 15 showed that regional students from likely credit constrained backgrounds were as likely to plan to attend university as their metropolitan peers. It was the unlikely and potentially constrained regional students who were less likely to plan to attend university at 15. Only regional potentially constrained students were less likely to graduate from high school than their metropolitan peers.

Using enrolment data from 2008–14 with regionality defined by commencing permanent home address, the findings regarding regional student enrolment growth over this seven year period were surprising. Regional student enrolment growth outstripped metropolitan and overall student enrolment growth over this period. This is in contrast to trends suggested in the existing data where regional status was not based on commencing home address, which shows flat growth in regional student numbers relative to the overall numbers. Another important theme to emerge was the fast growth in the number of regional students relocating to metropolitan locations to undertake higher education, far outstripping growth in regional students taking up higher education places in regional locations.

Finally, researchers investigated mobility of regional students to other regional locations. The findings showed a willingness among students to relocate from one regional location to another but there was a preference to stay 'close to home', even if moving to a new regional location. It was also found that higher education institutions based in larger regional locations were net attractors of regional students, and that universities and campuses based in smaller regional locations could not compete with institutions based in metropolitan or larger regional locations.

The findings are positive for regional access. Institutional arrangements in place to provide support for regional students seem to be effective. If anything, aspirations and school completion are where work is required in order to grow regional participation. Notwithstanding these claims, the post-demand-driven funding evidence suggested regional participation is growing quickly. Policy makers and the higher education sector face increasing challenges around competition between regional and metropolitan universities and the increasing demand for, and willingness to migrate to, metropolitan campuses among students from regional locations.

## Conclusions and Considerations for Policy

This report found that a change in the parameters of how regional participation is measured (regional origin rather than current regional address) reveals a higher rate of participation. Regional students remain underrepresented, however, their true level of access was higher than reflected in the current statistics based on existing indicators.

The number of regional students who move to the city has grown at a much faster rate than the number choosing to undertake study in regional areas. This has implications for the design of incentives that support regional delivery and regional student relocation. The demographics of students relocating also revealed a growing proportion of mature age students, students with disabilities and Indigenous students. This again has implications for the assumptions driving student income support and institutional support practices. The authors recommend piloting the use of commencing permanent home address as an additional indicator in Australian higher education, with potential use both in understanding social origin and mobility by statistical geography measures of regional and socioeconomic status.

The LSAY analysis highlighted that when controlling for other variables, regional status was not a significant driver of participation. Rather, school achievement and aspiration exerted more influence on poor outcomes relating to regional student school completion, higher education participation and higher education completion. To reiterate the policy implications of the findings based on LSAY data, investment in regional families, regional schools, partnerships between regional schools and higher education providers, and in regional school outreach programs, remain key interventions for improving regional student participation rates.

The emphasis in the report on regional student relocation to major cities was counterbalanced by analysis on mobility within regional Australia. Regional higher education delivery will continue to be an important feature of Australian higher education. The pattern evident in 2014 suggested that there were only a handful of regions with campuses operating at sufficient scale and reputation to act as net recruiters of students from a more distant regional geography.

Policy makers may wish to consider these patterns of mobility, and the extent to which regional campuses are serving a broader geography when investing in regional higher education delivery.

The authors anticipate that this study will be of interest to many stakeholders in regional higher education. Normative positions around whether the patterns of regional student participation and mobility are inherently positive or negative have been deliberately avoided. This study is perhaps the first of its kind in using a new indicator for student geographic origins, with potential applicability to regional and socioeconomic status-related policy questions. From the authors' perspective it throws new light on a long standing policy challenge, but also raises many additional questions. The authors encourage those that engage with this report to consider exploration around how this analytic approach can be used to progress the objectives of providing regional communities with better access to high quality tertiary education and an advanced skill base to drive social and economic development.

## **Expert Commentary: Paul Koshy**

### **Research Fellow**

### **National Centre for Student Equity in Higher Education**

Regional students face challenges which are familiar to their metropolitan counterparts. However, in addition to these, they also face disadvantage flowing from regional isolation. This report makes an important contribution to understanding the dimensions of this disadvantage.

The authors use data from the 2006 cohort of the Longitudinal Survey of Australian Youth (LSAY) to show that even after controlling for socioeconomic status (SES) and secondary academic progress (as proxied by the ENTER score), regional students are 4.7 per cent less likely to attend university than students in metropolitan areas. They are also 5.8 per cent less likely to graduate from university if they do get there. Take two students at age 15, one in the city and one in a regional area, with similar ENTER scores and socioeconomic backgrounds. The student from the regional area is 10.2 per cent less likely to graduate from university than the city student.

Why is this the case? One common explanation is that of credit constraints — those factors which inhibit a student's ability to fund the costs of their education. The authors use data on student credit constraints from the LSAY to examine the role these play in participation. They find no evidence to suggest that 'likely constrained' regional students are less likely to commence university than 'unlikely constrained' regional students or 'likely constrained' metropolitan students, after the factors identified above are controlled for. In fact, these

students tend to graduate at higher rates than others, implying that they are 'likely more talented and determined than might be expected.' So credit constraints don't appear to feed into differences in participation at the regional level or in a comparison with metropolitan areas, after accounting for other control factors.

However, the authors show that these other factors are important. Regional students who are 'likely credit constrained' are less likely to complete high school than their metropolitan counterparts. Additionally, 15-year-olds facing 'unlikely' or 'potential' credit constraints are less likely to 'have plans to attend university' than their metropolitan peers.

This combination of reduced secondary participation and lower expectations for post-secondary engagement, coupled with the finding that ENTER scores are a strong predictor of university outcomes, indicates that future efforts should be directed towards encouraging regional students to remain in secondary education, improving their academic performance, and ensuring access to more information about and exposure to opportunities in higher education.

As part of this study, the authors also examine another important attribute of regional disadvantage: the measurement of regional status. They make an important and often lost distinction between those students who commence higher education as regional students and the official measure of regional students, namely those who have a regional address as their current contact location. The use of the 'commencing address' is a welcome innovation as it captures students' background at the point of entry. The authors find that growth in regional student numbers in Australian higher education looks healthier using commencing address as a definition, with growth around 18.2 per cent between 2011 and 2014. This growth is higher than that seen in officially defined estimates, which use 'current address', and is in fact faster than that seen in the entire system during this period (15.6 per cent). This more accurate representation of regional participation is masked in official figures by movements of regional students to metropolitan areas (where they become 'non-regional students') and select regional areas with major campuses. Indeed, as the authors show, the growth of regional enrolments has taken place in such areas in recent years, with surprising trends such as the strong growth in the number of regional mature age students.

The implication of this research is that while regional students have done better than expected in recent years, they still face significant disadvantages compared to other students. Higher education policy has to address this challenge through the greater provision of outreach services in the regions, support for secondary completion, and an ongoing examination and response to the drivers of student participation at regional and metropolitan campuses.

**FULL REPORT:** <https://www.ncsehe.edu.au/publications/regional-student-participation-and-migration-analysis-of-factors-influencing-regional-student-participation-and-internal-migration-in-australian-higher-education/>

# Mentoring Programs and Equity Groups: The Australian Story

*Susan Beltman, Shamim Samani and Kate Ala'i*

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**Disability**  
**First in Family**  
**Indigenous**  
**International**  
**Low SES**  
**Regional**

Australia-wide mentorship programs structured for equity students perform exceptionally against evidence-based benchmarks. Researchers mapped mentorship programs offered by 39 universities across three stages: enabling, engagement and employment, and all of the surveyed equity group programs demonstrated good or exemplary practice. Seven recommendations were made for university practice in relation to mentoring programs and further research, including an examination of the specific support for disadvantaged students during and nearing course completion.

## Background

Universities have used various programs, including those involving mentoring, to support students from groups that are underrepresented in higher education—'equity groups'. While mentoring has been shown to have benefits for all students as well as those from equity groups, research has typically examined programs in one university or for one particular equity group and little is known about the extent of such programs across Australian universities.

## Objectives and Methodology

The project had three aims:

- to create a map showing the extent to which mentoring programs are used in Australian universities to support students from the different equity groups during the different phases of university life: enabling, engagement and employment
- to examine the extent to which features of a cross-section of programs aligned with existing best practice in mentoring guidelines and benchmarks
- to point to areas that need further research or that could inform current practice.

Research was conducted in two stages:

1. Stage One: Existing websites and publications were systematically searched to determine how many mentoring programs existed in 39 Australian universities. These could be general programs that would include students from disadvantaged groups, or programs that explicitly targeted equity groups.
2. Stage Two: University contacts from programs explicitly targeting equity groups were invited to complete a survey detailing features of the programs related to aspects such as program aims and structure, selection and support of mentees and mentors and program evaluation.

## Key findings and Recommendations

Stage One revealed 203 mentoring programs that either could include students from equity groups or that were equity-focused. Most general programs were aimed at the engagement phase of university life which is the period during which students attend or study at university. Most equity-focused programs occurred in the enabling phase where the aim is to raise aspirations and facilitate enrolment at university, and most of these programs targeted Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students.

In Stage Two, surveys from 12 programs covering four states and all equity groups were analysed against combined best practice benchmarks, with programs overall achieving 85 per cent alignment. Each benchmark was then analysed separately and, although there was some variation between programs, findings were positive.

Based on the project findings, seven recommendations were made for university practice in relation to mentoring and equity groups, and for further research:

1. Universities should examine the specific support required for students from disadvantaged groups during and nearing completion of their courses in specific institutions.
2. Research should be conducted to compare the effectiveness of general versus targeted mentoring programs for students from underrepresented groups.
3. Research should be conducted using in-depth case studies that explore the structure of mentoring programs using a range of participant and program data.
4. University programs should ensure that mentee selection processes are clearly outlined in the program information.
5. University equity-focused programs should ensure that, in addition to comprehensive mentor recruitment, training and support, mentees are provided with relevant preparation and support.
6. Research should be conducted to examine how universities evaluate and report on their program outcomes through a range of in-depth case studies that could include document analysis.
7. Examples of program details where benchmarks, particularly those relating to evaluation, are comprehensively addressed should be made available on websites of funding bodies or other central repositories.

## Conclusions and Considerations for Policy

The project showed that mentoring was used extensively to attract and support students from equity groups and to assist them towards successful completion and future employment. Such programs were mostly inclusive in that students from equity groups were included in programs available for all students.

Programs that target students from specific equity groups aligned well with established guidelines for effective mentoring. Some areas could have been improved for individual programs and others, such as evaluation, more generally. Further research is needed to explore the reasons for program differences and to link the benchmark alignment with outcomes for the participating students from equity groups.

Exemplars of programs aligning with the benchmarks could be made available to universities and individual program staff. Given that the majority of programs were site-specific and appeared to be tailored for their individual community needs, it may be useful for designers and coordinators to see how universities with similar students and similar needs have organised their programs.

## Expert Commentary: Ann Stewart

**Former Head, Student Access, Equity and Diversity  
University of the Sunshine Coast**

Beltman et al. have undertaken a commendable piece of research that is a comprehensive attempt to capture an overall picture of the nature and quality of equity-related mentoring programs across the Australian higher education sector. While the authors note there were limitations to this study, the report nevertheless draws important conclusions, not the least of which is that overall, evaluation of mentoring programs targeting students from equity backgrounds is less than adequate. The benchmarking framework developed as a central tool for the study could consequently prove to be valuable in improving the rigour of program evaluation, and additionally has potential to inform program development.

Given that mentoring forms a significant component of every university's widening participation strategy, this study highlights the pressing need for further and more specifically targeted research in this area. Although the authors make no such specific recommendation, it is also not too difficult to infer from the report, that there would be value in the establishment of national benchmarks to improve the overall quality of program evaluation.

Beltman et al. have provided a much needed overview of the mentoring programs taking place in our universities for students from equity backgrounds, programs which form a key element of most universities' widening participation strategies. Considering the investment made at national and institutional level, the report also identifies issues that deserve more in-depth study. This is an intriguing piece of research that will be of interest to practitioners and policy makers, and which begs to have follow-up.

**FULL REPORT:** <https://www.ncsehe.edu.au/publications/mentoring-programs-and-equity-groups-the-australian-story/>



# It's About Time: Working towards More Equitable Understandings of the Impact of Time for Students in Higher Education

*Penny Jane Burke, Anna Bennett, Matthew Bunn, Jacqueline Stevenson and Sue Clegg*

The University of Newcastle

## **International Regional**

Many equity students in higher education are challenged by institutional expectations about 'time', because of inflexible and competing work, caring and personal commitments. This research focused primarily on regional and rural students, advocating an institutional emphasis on students' engagement with learning, alongside flexible undergraduate programs that are responsive to the complexities of each student's background.

## **Background**

Students' experiences of 'time' and the dominant perceptions of 'time management' impact significantly on the attraction, retention, and performance of students in higher education, although the subject has received little research attention.

Many higher education students, particularly those from equity groups, cite 'time pressures' as a major reason for leaving study, but the assumption persists that time is a neutral and linear framework in which all students are equally positioned.

Regional and rural students represent an important equity group in the context of 'time'. They must often transition from slower paced contexts into regional centres or cities and find accommodation, transportation, and often employment whilst adjusting to tertiary study.

## **Objectives and Methodology**

The research project investigated the impact of institutional expectations associated with time management on the attraction, retention, and performance of students in higher education, and how students from regional and rural areas attempted to effectively manage their time.

The report aimed to develop a platform from which embedded assumptions of time management in higher education can be reconfigured as flexible and responsive to the needs of students, to better support their learning experiences.

Qualitative data was collected from interviews with 47 undergraduate students from three regional universities across Australia and the United Kingdom to build on work conducted in this area. In each case, the student population included significant representation from equity groups including students from regional and rural backgrounds.

The analytical framework drew on interdisciplinary theories from education and sociology, grounded in the critical sociology of higher education.

## **Key Findings and Recommendations**

Institutional assumptions about time management and an emphasis on assessment deadlines, rather than students' engagement with learning, did not accommodate the complex demands and expectations that regional and rural students faced. This was reflected in the advice and information made available to students in the development of

time management skills, which often operated on assumptions of poor organisation and low motivation, rather than the pressures of meeting a range of demands and commitments.

Students from regional and rural backgrounds faced significant time constraints relating to finding accommodation quickly and/or organising travel. This pressure was compounded when students were required to find, and maintain, paid employment to cover associated costs.

While students' personal circumstances and available resources often necessitated some online study, there was a strong preference for face-to-face learning. Interviewees reported the benefits of an engagement with teachers, deeper understanding of topics, and a connection with learning.

## Conclusions and Considerations for Policy

Greater understanding and awareness of the particular, and multiple, demands that students from regional and rural backgrounds navigate in relation to time management would support the aim of creating greater equity in higher education.

Given students' different social circumstances and available resources, it is crucial that higher education has the capacity to address difference rather than assuming all students must be treated the same. Attention to difference (in the context of improving student equity) requires that university staff are able to exercise flexibility on behalf of students.

A balance between structured time (for example, scheduled lectures, seminars, and tutorials) and flexible time (for example online learning and independent study) is important for student equity within, and across, programs of study. Regional and rural students require flexibility, but also the recognition that the inability to attend all classes is not simply an indicator of poor time management or lack of motivation.

Pedagogies should avoid focusing only on assessment deadlines and instead emphasise processes of learning and developing understanding.

Greater transparency and clarity in communicating with students before they commence their studies about accommodation and travel options would help them anticipate the time needed in the transition to beginning their university study. Additionally, structures could be put into place to support students in navigating the accommodation and/or travel options available (such as negotiating within the private rental market and/or identifying safe travel arrangements). This would ensure students are not vulnerable to commercial practices or unsafe travel arrangements, particularly when they are facing severe time constraints in relation to their regional and rural backgrounds.

Further research could build on this study to explore these issues across a wider range of student groups and institutional and disciplinary contexts. Such research is particularly significant at a time when higher education is looking increasingly to online forms of course provision to reach more students. Time and student equity must be key considerations in such developments, and be explored in ways that examine the relationship between time, space, equity, and social differences.

## Expert Commentary: Lisa Andrewartha

**Senior Research Officer and Senior Project Coordinator  
La Trobe University**

Burke, Bennett, Bunn, Stevenson and Clegg provide a thorough exploration of how perceptions of time and time pressures impact on the educational experiences of students from equity groups. In this qualitative study, a total of 47 students were interviewed from one regional university in Australia and two regional universities in the United Kingdom.

Drawing on the concept of 'timescapes', the authors find that students' experiences of time pressures vary widely due to factors such as employment, caring responsibilities, social and geographic location, and availability of support. The report highlights the significant time constraints often faced by students from regional and remote backgrounds such as the need to relocate quickly, commute long distances, and/or undertake increased hours of paid work. Major findings include the overwhelming preference among regional and remote students for face-to-face delivery over distance or online delivery, with students feeling more connected to their learning when they attended classes in person.

Burke et al. contend that a balance between structured time and flexible time is particularly important for student equity. The authors argue that student equity policies and practices must "rethink simplistic notions of time management in order to recognise and address students' differential relations to time".

This comprehensive and cross-national report makes a valuable contribution at a time when many students are juggling study, work, and personal commitments, and many universities are looking increasingly to online course provision.

**FULL REPORT:** <https://www.ncsehe.edu.au/publications/its-about-time-working-towards-more-equitable-understandings-of-the-impact-of-time-for-students-in-higher-education/>

# WIL Wellbeing: Exploring Impacts of Unpaid Practicum on Student Wellbeing

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Work Integrated Learning (WIL) students are seeking greater levels of support from universities to reflect the personal and financial stresses associated with their participation. Quantitative and qualitative data from surveys and focus groups—including students and administrators—identified the importance of institutional and community support to promote student wellbeing. The insights offered by this report informed recommendations for universities and registration/accreditation bodies to improve WIL student outcomes through the refinement of program policies and practices.

## Background

Australian universities are under increasing pressure to support students to develop the graduate skills and knowledge required to transition from education into professional practice. The adoption of a range of Work Integrated Learning (WIL) approaches to achieve this aim represents an increasingly prevalent part of the tertiary education landscape.

However, successes in increasing the participation of diverse groups in higher education challenge assumptions regarding students' extra-study commitments and the potential impacts of these on students' capacity to participate in WIL activities, particularly unpaid placements.

Despite these shifts, there has been limited exploration of student experiences of WIL through a wellbeing lens or with an explicit focus on the equity considerations.

## Objectives and Methodology

Through the voices and experiences of WIL administrators and participants from the disciplines of health and social services, education and nursing this research identified the personal impacts of participation in WIL, beyond the impacts of professional development and in-situ learning.

This research explored personal and other factors influencing students' experiences of WIL placements and their coping strategies for managing the reciprocal impacts of participation on other commitments.

Data for this study was collected using an online student survey, student focus groups, and staff focus groups. The survey and focus group data was analysed using qualitative and quantitative approaches. The analyses sought to identify the impact that personal and other factors can have on the practicum experience, the impact of the practicum experience on other parts of the student's life such as paid work commitments and work-study-life conflicts, and the perceived impact of this on their wellbeing.

In connecting WIL and wellbeing, researchers introduced the concept of WIL wellbeing as a construct to identify the impacts of WIL on participants' wellbeing within and beyond the learning context.

Explicitly connecting WIL and wellbeing, and foregrounding the everyday life experiences of WIL participants, the research highlighted the contribution of personal coping strategies (many of which are taken into post-graduation professional practice) to managing a successful WIL experience. In the context of the broad scale adoption of WIL as a learning pedagogy, this research also considered how universities and WIL placement workplaces can better support students in preparation for, and during, their WIL experiences.

## Key Findings and Recommendations

WIL participants experienced considerable levels of financial stress as a result of undertaking a WIL placement due to the intensive unpaid nature of WIL placements; the additional costs incurred as a result of the placement; relational stressors; and the financial impacts of lost wages. Research participants, regardless of their familial or employment circumstances, suggested that additional financial assistance and support was required by many WIL participants to support their participation.

WIL workplaces need better preparation and support to positively contribute to participant wellbeing and learning outcomes. Both WIL administrator and student participants in this research identified the impact of attitudes and behaviours of supervisors, co-workers and clients within the WIL workplace on student wellbeing. They concluded that better training, support and vetting of potential WIL workplaces and supervisors is required.

Greater levels of institutional and community support are required to support WIL participant wellbeing. In addition to more supportive supervisory relationships within the WIL workplace, WIL participants are seeking greater levels of pastoral care, staff support and empathy from universities. Combined, peer, family, community and university support made an important contribution to a successful WIL experience, however, available institutional support and eligibility requirements need to be better communicated to students, particularly those that may not have existing support networks.

## Conclusions and Considerations for Policy

Examining the equity implications of WIL participation, this research revealed new insights about participant experiences and has the potential to inform WIL policies and practices to support student wellbeing.

Acknowledging the potential impact of extra-curricular commitments, such as paid employment and caring responsibilities, and other personal factors, on the WIL experience and providing focused support is important for supporting student wellbeing, and increasing the potential for a successful placement. Both WIL administrator and student participants in this research proposed that universities and registration/accreditation bodies need to consider alternatives to unpaid WIL placements or structural changes to placement requirements which limit extended unpaid placements.

WIL wellbeing is determined by personal coping strategies and institutional and community support. It is therefore imperative that all stakeholders involved in managing, administering and promoting universal WIL participation are cognisant of the potential impacts of WIL on participants' wellbeing.

## Expert Commentary: Robyn Quin

Office of the Deputy Vice-Chancellor  
Curtin University

This timely paper examines the impact of Work Integrated Learning placements on university students. As universities seek to gain a competitive edge through a focus on graduate employability, actively market the opportunities they provide for Work Integrated Learning experiences and, at the same time, fight to secure the necessary number of work placements, this paper is a welcome intervention. As practicum placements become ever harder to find it will be critical for universities to focus on the quality of the work experience provided for their students.

The paper offers insights and analysis of value to both those seeking to enter the field of workplace learning and experienced WIL practitioners. The impressive literature survey is a useful introduction to the field and the research to date, and is also of value to those new to the field. For those familiar with the area, the paper offers a strong evidence-based study of the impact of Work Integrated Learning on both students and those responsible for the construction and delivery of WIL experiences.

A particular strength of the study is its inclusion of a range of perspectives on WIL – of students, university academics and administrators. The sample sizes are robust and the findings compelling. The key findings on the impacts of unpaid WIL on students: financial stress; the need for improved workplace support; training in the supervision of WIL; and the need for more support from the home university, should inform university policy and practice in workplace learning.

**FULL REPORT:** <https://www.ncsehe.edu.au/publications/wil-wellbeing-impacts-of-unpaid-practicum-on-student-wellbeing/>



# School Experiences, Career Guidance, and the University Participation of Young People from Three Equity Groups in Australia

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Career guidance and positive secondary school experiences have a significant bearing on equity students' propensity to enrol in tertiary education. This report provides new, contemporary Australian evidence on the interrelations between equity group membership, school experiences and university enrolment in young people from advantaged and disadvantaged social strata.

## Background

Since Australia's shift into a post-industrial economy and a post-modern society, the early life-course trajectories of young Australians have become more diverse and less structured. From the early 1990s, the increasing availability and popularity of Vocational Education and Training (VET) programs and the expansion of low-skilled, entry-level service jobs have created attractive alternatives to university for many young people. However, these changes have not been randomly distributed across social strata. Instead, it has been documented that emerging options acting as alternatives to tertiary education have been disproportionately chosen by young people from disadvantaged backgrounds.

It is of paramount importance that we understand the complex choices that young people in Australia face when deciding whether or not to enrol in university, the factors influencing such decisions, and whether or not these mechanisms operate differently for young people from advantaged and disadvantaged social strata.

Two important school factors which are strongly associated with young people's chances of enrolling in university are career advice and guidance, and school experiences. These factors have been shown to have a substantial influence on young people's post-school outcomes, including their university participation. However, while the international evidence from countries such as the United States, the United Kingdom and Germany is rapidly growing, few studies have addressed this issue in the Australian context.

## Objectives and Methodology

This report addressed important gaps in knowledge in the Australian context concerning the issues discussed above. Specifically, it answered the following research questions:

- How is equity group membership associated with students' likelihood to enrol into university in contemporary Australia?
- How are (secondary) school factors (i.e. career guidance and school experiences) associated with students' likelihood to enrol into university in contemporary Australia?
- Are the impacts of school factors on university enrolment different for young people from equity and non-equity groups?

To answer these research questions, high-quality, nationally representative longitudinal data from the 2003 cohort of the Longitudinal Study of Australian Youth, and state-of-the-art event-history regression models were leveraged.

The report focused on three of the current equity groups:

- young people from low socioeconomic (low SES) backgrounds
- young people from non-English speaking backgrounds (NESB)
- young people from regional or remote areas within Australia.

## Key Findings and Recommendations

The research yielded three key findings:

- Young people from low SES backgrounds and from regional and remote areas within Australia were less likely to enrol into university than young people from high socioeconomic backgrounds and non-regional and remote areas within Australia, with the exception of students from NESB backgrounds who were more likely to enrol at university.
- Students who held positive attitudes towards school, who reported having a positive relationship with their teachers, and who received certain forms of career guidance were more likely to enrol at university, and did so at earlier ages. However, not all forms of career guidance were found to be equally associated with university enrolment. The strongest positive effects were found for talks by TAFE or university representatives, and schools' career advisors, while negative effects were found for employer representative talks and group discussion about careers.
- Some school factors had stronger effects on university enrolment amongst students from equity groups. Positive student-teacher relations and talks by school career advisors were more conducive to subsequent university enrolment amongst young people from low SES backgrounds, and positive student-teacher relations and career group discussions more strongly predicted subsequent university enrolment amongst young people from regional and remote areas within Australia.

## Conclusions and Considerations for Policy

While they cannot be considered causal, these findings are important and policy relevant. In particular, they provide evidence of the importance of in-school career advice and guidance and school experiences in shaping the chances of university participation among young people, particularly those from equity groups.

Policy initiatives aimed at improving these school factors are likely to result in expanded university enrolments, and smaller enrolment gaps between young people from advantaged and disadvantaged social strata. In addition, these factors are relatively easy to address through policy intervention (as they can be regulated by government through schools) and are 'preventive strategies' with fewer costs and greater returns to investment than 'remedial strategies' to compensate for social disadvantage due to poor education. Therefore, the authors argue that investments into these factors should be considered a priority.

## Expert Commentary: Andrew Norton

**Higher Education Program Director  
Grattan Institute**

The vast majority of later-year school students receive information about post-school study and career options. But what impact does whether and how this information is received have on future study? Wojtek Tomaszewski and colleagues explore this topic using LSAY data.

In the overall LSAY sample, listening to a TAFE or university representative and looking online for career guidance are most strongly associated with future university entry. Perhaps this is because these are voluntary actions by students already considering university (each done by about half the sample). For low SES students, talks by a school careers advisor were most important. With more than 80 per cent of the sample attending such a talk, this may be a compulsory activity that includes students who might not otherwise consider university.

Unfortunately, the often over-stretched careers advisors on which low SES students disproportionately rely are not always able to give good advice. Other recent research suggests low SES students are more likely than high SES students to discontinue a course due to a change in career plans. Better initial advice could put them on the right career path more quickly and at lower cost.

That advice will not necessarily be in favour of higher education. This study summarises research findings pointing to higher education's life advantages, but these on-average findings for earlier, smaller cohorts of graduates need to be used cautiously. For less academic young men at least, upper level vocational qualifications are still likely to be a good alternative to higher education. Careers advice should alert students to realistic options given their aptitudes, abilities and ambitions, without a bias towards higher education.

**FULL REPORT:** <https://www.ncsehe.edu.au/publications/school-experiences-career-guidance-and-the-university-participation-of-young-people-from-three-equity-groups-in-australia/>

# Understanding the Completion Patterns of Equity Students in Regional Universities

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Completion patterns of cohorts enrolled in Regional University Network (RUN) universities are influenced by the sociocultural, structural and economic implications of equity group membership. This report synthesised prior research on the sociocultural and financial context that students at RUN universities encounter, extending a comparative analysis of completion patterns and informing mitigation strategies to enhance the retention of equity group students in RUN universities.

## Background

Regional universities perform an important role in creating and contributing to dynamic communities in their regions, and to increasing and widening participation in higher education. The successful completion of students who study at regional universities is not only a social justice issue but is critical to building capacity in these communities and contributing to the nation's knowledge-based economy.

While recent higher education policy and funding has encouraged growth in numbers from students from traditionally underrepresented and disadvantaged groups, factors influencing regional participation are longstanding, multi-dimensional and complex, with much recent attention focusing on the relative effects of membership within equity groups.

Department of Education and Training (DET) completion reports have indicated that RUN universities have lower completion rates across all cohorts compared to the completion rates of these cohorts at metropolitan universities. These differences call for a deeper understanding of the factors that impact upon completion rates at RUN universities to shift the focus from the narratives of deficit to one that more appropriately focuses on public policy interventions to mitigate structural and sociocultural disadvantage.

## Objectives and Methodology

This report aimed to deepen understanding of the higher education experiences of equity cohorts at RUN universities. It synthesised prior research on the sociocultural and financial context that students at RUN universities encounter, to augment a comparative analysis of completion patterns.

Research conducted for this study had two major components:

- analysis of a specific data set from DET—arising from the data set used to undertake its cohort-tracking analyses—to compare the profiles and completion patterns of students attending RUN universities with those of students attending metropolitan universities

- review of existing evidence and research, exploring the issues and challenges faced by equity cohorts participating in higher education at RUN universities, to establish a picture of the sociocultural and economic challenges facing RUN cohorts, with a particular focus on RUN equity cohorts.

## Key Findings and Recommendations

Across all equity cohorts, RUN universities had a higher percentage of enrolments of equity group students compared to metropolitan universities. Students from equity groups faced a number of structural challenges in accessing, participating in, and completing higher education, including geographical location, financial constraints, emotional factors and ‘socio-cultural incongruity’, as conceptualised by Marcia Devlin in her 2013 seminal paper, *Bridging socio-cultural incongruity: Conceptualising the success of students from low socioeconomic status backgrounds in Australian higher education*. The impact of belonging to multiple equity groups exacerbated these challenges.

RUN universities have been highly successful in mitigating multiple disadvantage at policy and practice levels, with the majority of RUN students successfully graduating from bachelor degrees. Furthermore, RUN universities demonstrated a measure of success in mitigating disadvantage through comparable completion patterns of equity group students and non-equity RUN students, who faced some of the same structural challenges. Notably, high levels of student satisfaction with the quality of teaching and learning and student support were achieved by RUN universities.

These key recommendations will mitigate the multiple sociocultural, financial and structural challenges that students at RUN universities encounter:

### Recommendations for Institutions:

- Continue community and family outreach programs to further develop responsive student support networks.
- Offer flexible access to learning resources and diversify curriculum structures, delivery modes and schedules.
- Provide financial subsidies to reduce stress and remove barriers for individual students.
- Create a sense of belonging through partnerships with students.
- Engage families and communities to broaden the understanding and experience of ‘going to university’.
- Respond to students’ challenges by enabling constructive cycles of learning.
- Offer greater flexibility in learning and assessment design and strategies.

### Recommendations for the Sector:

- Increase investment in regional schools and widening participation programs.
- Continue to build partnerships to enhance regional infrastructure and communities.
- Focus on building economic stability in regional communities.
- Promote emotional wellbeing through compensating disadvantage.
- Invest in managing ‘critical first encounters’.
- Mitigate intergenerational disadvantage.
- Establish and maintain constructive engagement with regional communities.
- Continue to support relevant research.
- Recognise flexible progression pathways and nested qualifications.

## Conclusions and Considerations for Policy

Factors that contribute to completion rates for RUN students are nuanced, complex and multifaceted. The issues facing RUN cohorts and regional universities will not be addressed

by adopting narratives that attribute blame to either students or institutions. Rather, we must take account of the sociocultural, financial and structural challenges that remain inherent in our system and that impact on completion rates.

This report highlighted the complex challenges encountered by equity group students and is well placed to facilitate the application of practices that counter disadvantage, thereby promoting a fairer, more equitable system of higher education.

### **Expert Commentary: Andrew Harvey**

**Director, Centre for Higher Education Equity and Diversity Research  
La Trobe University**

Nelson et al.'s report compares student completion rates between the six Regional Universities Network (RUN) institutions and the rest of the sector. While many universities enrol large numbers of regional students, the authors note that RUN universities typically enrol far more students who are members of one or more equity groups, and who are First in Family. In addition, the RUN universities enrol relatively large numbers of students who are mature age, enrolled externally, and enrolled part-time. Each of these factors is correlated with higher attrition. The report notes that student satisfaction levels at RUN universities are comparable to the sector average, and that completion rates within RUN universities do not differ substantially by the socioeconomic status of students. Lower completion rates at RUN universities are therefore not the result of low student satisfaction or teaching quality, nor of any supposed deficits that low SES students may hold.

The report acknowledges differences in prior educational attainment of students across the sector, though this coverage could perhaps have been extended given its importance to completions. Differences in academic preparation affect not only the regional/metropolitan participation gap, but the subsequent success and completion rates of university students. The report advocates greater investment in the regions, including through outreach, HEPPP and the regional loading, to support students facing sociocultural, financial and structural challenges, and institutions which are central to the future of regional Australia. The data also suggest that attempts to introduce performance based funding into the sector will need to control carefully for student inputs.

**FULL REPORT:** <https://www.ncsehe.edu.au/publications/completion-patterns-of-equity-students-in-regional-universities/>



# Opportunity through Online Learning: Improving Student Access, Participation and Success in Higher Education

2016 Equity Fellow Cathy Stone

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Improving student outcomes in post-secondary online learning requires a strategic, tailored approach, emphasising student engagement and individualised monitoring, support and outreach. Qualitative interviews with education practitioners from 15 Australian universities and The Open University UK informed 10 *National Guidelines to Improve Student Outcomes in Online Learning*. This resource provides evidence-based sector leadership on improving the success and retention of students in online education.

## Background

Online learning has a critical place in widening access and participation in education for a diverse range of students, many of whom are from backgrounds which have been historically underrepresented at university. Students from low socioeconomic backgrounds, students with disability, regional and remote students, Indigenous students, and students who are first in their families to enter university, are represented particularly strongly in online undergraduate programs.

However, both retention and completion rates for online distance students are considerably lower than amongst those enrolled as on-campus students. As a result, concerns about student retention and academic achievement within online studies have been emerging across the global higher education sector.

The research discussed in this report has been conducted for a national Australian study with United Kingdom participation to address these concerns.

## Objectives and Methodology

This study was designed to complement the existing body of online student experience research. Interviews were conducted with 151 individual academic and professional staff members, across a total of 16 higher education institutions, which consisted of: 14 Australian universities offering both online and on-campus studies; Open Universities Australia which enrolls students into online higher education studies, largely by open-entry, across 13 Australian universities; and The Open University UK, which provides open-entry distance education, delivered primarily online.

The interviews investigated the practices and strategies being used within the online higher education context, including planning, teaching, support and education delivery, and the extent to which these practices are effectively supporting students to stay and succeed.

## Key Findings and Recommendations

From analysis of the interview data and other related published research, seven key findings emerged:

- A strategic whole-of-institution approach is required; one that recognises online education as 'core business'. This approach needs to include an institution-wide understanding of the nature and diversity of the online student cohort as well as the development and implementation of quality standards for online education which undergo continuous quality improvement.
- Early intervention with students to connect, prepare and engage is essential; particularly in terms of providing realistic expectations and encouraging and facilitating academic preparation.
- 'Teacher-presence' plays a vital role in building a sense of belonging to the learning community and in improving student retention; however the time-consuming nature of developing and maintaining 'teacher-presence' is not always recognised in existing workload models.
- Content, curriculum and delivery need to be designed specifically for online learning; they need to be engaging, interactive, supportive and designed to strengthen interaction amongst students.
- Regular and structured contact between the institution and the student is important in providing connection and direction along the student journey. This includes proactively reaching out to students at particular points along their journey, and is best achieved through the development of an institutional framework of interventions.
- Learning analytics play an important role in informing appropriate and effective student interventions, including through predictive modelling and personalising the learning experience.
- Collaboration across the institution is required to integrate and embed support; delivering it to students at point of need. When academic and professional staff cross traditional boundaries to work more closely together, a more holistic student experience can be delivered, including embedding support within curriculum.

## Conclusions and Considerations for Policy

Findings from the research conducted along with other international research findings have been used to inform the development of the *National Guidelines*, to provide sector leadership on evidence-based ways to improve the success and retention of students in online education. Through advising institutions on ways to improve outcomes for online students, the *National Guidelines* have the potential to make a significant impact in and beyond the Australian context by increasing opportunities for diverse cohorts of students to achieve their learning goals at any stage of life.

These guidelines outline practical means by which institutions can provide online students with a more engaging and supportive learning experience, hence making it possible for many more to stay, participate and achieve their learning goals. The focus of these guidelines is on improving student outcomes in online undergraduate programs and in online pathways/enabling programs. However, they may also have relevance and applicability for other areas within post-secondary education. One of these is the area of online postgraduate studies where, in any given cohort, there are likely to be a certain number of students who have gained entry to their degree via recognition of prior learning, through previous vocational level studies and/or work-based training and experience.

These guidelines may also be useful within the VET sector, where similarly there are likely to be many students entering with little prior experience of formal online study. Hence, these

guidelines, while developed from research centred on undergraduate and enabling online education may be regarded as applicable to the post-secondary online education sector more broadly.

## Expert Commentary: Marcia Devlin

**Deputy Vice-Chancellor: Learning and Quality  
Federation University Australia**

As online learning becomes increasingly ubiquitous in higher education, it is critical that we are focused on enabling success for online students who are generally at higher risk of disengagement and attrition.

Cathy's calls for strategic, whole-of-institution, holistic, integrated approaches that recognise online education as 'core business'; investment in online education to ensure opportunity; institution-wide quality standards for delivery of online education; the development of institutional frameworks for interventions; a focus on leveraging the power of learning analytics; and the facilitation of cross-institutional collaboration are insightful and timely for higher education leaders. In addition, Cathy provides thought-provoking commentary about academic workloads in online teaching contexts that requires close consideration.

For those closer to the coalface, Cathy provides useful, plain-language suggestions about online design and delivery for busy academics. Her reminders for teachers to know their students; intervene early to enable connection with those students; help students understand the expectations of them; and be present in online environments are enhanced by Cathy's clear advice for how to put these strategies into practice.

As well as new learning from her project, Cathy provides links to existing evidence-based advice that is accessible and user-friendly, thereby bringing relevant material together in one place. Cathy's work highlights the potential of online education for enhancing the student experience both within and adjunct to the formal curriculum.

I commend this work to leaders and practitioners in higher education who want to improve policy and practice in online education.

**FULL REPORT:** <https://www.ncsehe.edu.au/publications/opportunity-online-learning-improving-student-access-participation-success-higher-education/>

# Fair Connection to Professional Careers: Understanding Social Difference and Disadvantage, Institutional Dynamics and Technological Opportunities

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The application of new and emerging digital technologies could improve equity students' access to high-status professions by enhancing disciplinary learning and creating authentic connections to higher education and the world of work. In response to the analysis of three significant data sets, a road map of these technologies, including virtual and augmented reality, was produced to assist students, teachers, researchers and policy makers in developing digital immersive environments designed to enhance fair connection to the professions.

## Background

Young people from low socioeconomic status (SES), regional and remote, and Indigenous backgrounds may have significant career aspirations but are less likely to gain access to university and are underrepresented in a range of high-status degrees such as Medicine, Law, Architecture and Engineering, and associated professions.

While there has been an understandable focus on academic achievement as a key barrier to accessing high-status degrees, there are other educational and sociocultural factors preventing talented young people from reaching their goals.

## Objectives and Methodology

The objective of this project was to explore the complexity surrounding access to high-status degrees and their associated professions for young people experiencing disadvantage, with special attention paid to the potential of new and emerging digital technologies as a means of creating authentic, early connection to high-status careers.

Research comprised three interrelated components:

1. analysis of data from existing data sets from the Aspirations Longitudinal Study of school students in Australia and a study of First-in-Family (FiF) students enrolled in medical degrees (FiF is correlated with low SES)
2. a national scoping of barriers and enablers to high-status professions through interviewing experts in the field
3. the development of a road map (or primer) of existing and emerging digital technologies and their potential application for K-12 education and career exploration.

## Key Findings and Recommendations

Higher education participation data indicates that people from equity groups are underrepresented, often significantly so, in the university degrees associated with high-

status professions and this was generally the case in elite universities. High school students experiencing disadvantage who had career aspirations to high-status professions had very limited capacity to undertake ‘taster’ work experience that would allow them to explore these careers. Often schools focused on vocational career pathways with students required to find their own work experience placement. In the main, working class students got working class work experience. This hampered their ability to authentically explore career options and develop a deep, academically-embedded understanding of what was required to gain a place at university in high-status degrees.

Analysis of the FiF data set, which focused on Indigenous and non-Indigenous students’ experiences of ‘extreme social mobility’ revealed that students often had protracted and circuitous pathways into medical education and that many received minimal encouragement or useful education about a career in medicine. Some FiF students experienced stigma related to their family or cultural background in medical school but all saw their ‘humble’ backgrounds as an invaluable professional resource that they could deploy in their career as a doctor. They viewed their career as a giving back to communities of origin or ‘mob’ in the case of Indigenous students.

In response to the research findings, the *Immersed in the Future* report was developed to provide an accessible primer on using new and emerging digital technologies, such as virtual and augmented reality, for career exploration. The report is a call to action for teachers, university educators, policy makers, and students of all ages to actively participate in developing ideas and applications for using new and emerging technologies to create deeper disciplinary and interdisciplinary learning and more authentic connection to post-school education and the world of work.

## Conclusions and Considerations for Policy

Continued scholarly inquiry and policy accountability is required, particularly as these relate to the complex factors that prevent students who are experiencing disadvantage from reaching their academic potential. This includes access to: an academic curriculum; inspiring quality career education; and a broad range of authentic ‘taster’ work experience placements.

A more transparent and sustained tracking of participation rates by broad and specific Fields of Education, including those related to high-status degrees, would ensure that the issue of proportional representation of students from equity groups stays firmly on the agenda for universities and the professions themselves. This would include serious scrutiny of equitable access to high-status degrees in elite universities. There is a need to more fully understand and respond to the experiences of students from equity groups who, often against considerable odds, secure a place in a high-status university degree, including their post-graduation aspirations and pathways.

Now is the time to commit to innovation in education and career exploration using new and emerging digital technologies such as virtual and augmented reality. This must be done *with* low-income school communities and university students from equity groups so that authentic technological applications are developed to enhance disciplinary learning and understand its links to the world of work.

## Expert Commentary: Sarah O’Shea

**Associate Professor  
University of Wollongong**

When the statistics on university program choice are examined closely, it is clear that the number of students entering high-status degrees, such as Medicine and Law, are skewed towards those who are more economically and socially advantaged. While universities have

certainly increased access to degrees, can this be regarded as equitable access if those from equity backgrounds (low SES, regional or remote, amongst others) remain underrepresented in certain degree programs?

Erica has tackled one of the most enduring problems in the higher education environment: how do we ensure equitable educational access universally? As Erica points out this is a 'wicked problem' that is underpinned by structural constraint, biases and social norms that when combined, subtly delineate what young people see as possible in their educational futures.

Erica's approach to this matter is to think 'outside the box' and she successfully combines empirical data and global consultations with an in-depth knowledge of the technological field to propose exciting and innovative approaches to addressing this issue.

As Erica herself explains, this Fellowship has allowed her to 'dream big' and apply diverse methodologies and interventions to an area that has defied normative solutions. Erica explores how the utilisation of augmented and virtual technologies can provide possible 'gateways' for young people to envision an educational imaginary.

Lacking a recourse to the actual lived experience of high profile professions, Erica has identified how new technologies can offer young people an experiential and embodied sense of what being a doctor, lawyer or engineer might mean. This virtual pathway provides an opportunity for individuals to actualise themselves in that role, regardless of their social, cultural or geographic contexts.

This is a highly innovative but embryonic area of study that provides much scope for educational access and equity. Erica's research and Fellowship recommendations are foundational to future directions and developments in this field.

**FULL REPORT:** <https://www.ncsehe.edu.au/publications/fair-connection-to-professional-careers-understanding-social-difference-and-disadvantage-institutional-dynamics-and-technological-opportunities/>



# The Australian Student Equity Program and Institutional Change: Paradigm Shift or Business as Usual?

2016 Equity Fellow Nadine Zacharias

Deakin University

**Disability**  
**First in Family**  
**Indigenous**  
**International**  
**Low SES**  
**Regional**

The Higher Education Participation and Partnerships Program (HEPPP) has provided an opportunity for universities to develop bespoke equity programs which respond to their institutional profile and strategic priorities, but many important outcomes of HEPPP funded work are not currently recognised by decision makers. This Australian-first comprehensive analysis of HEPPP has informed recommendations for systemic change in policy and practice in student equity, and set benchmarks for a national evaluation framework reflecting broader measures of success.

## Background

The vision of an Australian higher education system that actively widened participation and whose graduates reflected more closely the diversity of the Australian population was articulated in the *Bradley Review of Higher Education* and adopted as a fundamental aspiration of significant higher education reform implemented from 2010.

The Higher Education Participation and Partnerships Program (HEPPP) was designed to encourage the sector to support the Government's aspiration, and has provided significant funding to 37 public universities to implement equity strategies and programs enabling people from low socioeconomic status (SES) backgrounds to access and succeed in higher education.

To date, there has been no national investigation of the design and implementation of institutional HEPPP programs in different universities and how this contributed to student outcomes at institutional and sector levels.

## Objectives and Methodology

This Fellowship sought to understand how HEPPP had been implemented by universities and whether the sector had acted on the Government's aspiration. The project took a collaborative approach, developing questions in consultation with an advisory group. It used a qualitative methodology including the analysis of HEPPP annual progress reports between 2010 and 2015, three institutional case studies, and an engagement strategy with the Australian Government Department of Education and Training and key stakeholders across the sector.

The Fellowship produced a set of diagnostic tools, an interpretive model and an *Equity Initiatives Map*, to enable analyses of HEPPP program design and implementation in the context of institutional equity strategy and performance.

The three case studies demonstrated the application of the tools to identify universities' strategic approaches to HEPPP implementation and the success factors, outcomes, and challenges associated with these.

## Key Findings and Recommendations

### Implementation

- HEPPP has provided an opportunity for universities to develop bespoke equity programs which respond to their institutional profile and strategic priorities.
- Case studies illustrated the diversity of HEPPP implementation and the importance of institutional context in designing and analysing HEPPP programs.
- Universities needed to 'translate' the policy focus on people from low SES backgrounds to their local context which led to different interpretations of what constitutes 'low SES'.
- Program design in most cases was built on existing strategies and infrastructure which pre-dated HEPPP.
- Analyses of HEPPP expenditure and effort in 2011 and 2015 revealed a consistent under-investment in the access phase and a substantial increase in investment in the attainment and transition out phase.
- Good management practices and organisational approaches matter for the successful implementation of institutional HEPPP programs.

### Evaluation

- HEPPP has demonstrated success in promoting equity across the higher education sector, but institutional level outcomes for low SES students remain uneven with some universities contributing disproportionately to the national increase in low SES participation.
- Unpacking the complex relationships between institutional HEPPP programs and student outcomes is difficult, and there were no clear correlations between the changes in low SES participation rates, institutional growth, HEPPP funding received, and cohort diversity.
- The contributions of demand-driven funding and HEPPP were delineated conceptually: Demand-driven funding solves access issues at sector level, but not necessarily at the institutional level, due to university selection criteria. HEPPP funded work improved awareness, aspirations, attainment and affordability. Both policies were limited in their ability to comprehensively influence attainment at school level.
- Strategic intent may explain some of the variation in outcomes, with the three case study universities exhibiting different growth strategies and different approaches to program design, yielding different changes to access and participation rates.
- The *Equity Initiatives Map* is a powerful tool to produce a national picture of HEPPP expenditure and effort, enabling life cycle analysis and consistent terminology across institutions and programs.
- More comprehensive measures of success and the development of a national HEPPP evaluation framework are necessary. The 'Major Aims' specified in the *Equity Initiatives Map* could be used as the starting point to develop a suite of evaluation tools.

### HEPPP as a Driver of Change

- HEPPP has been a catalyst for organisational change by increasing the focus on student equity, promoting understanding of barriers to participation, and creating an expert workforce on equity issues. All the case study universities reported processes of strategic intention in their widening participation initiatives.

- Drivers of change included the volume of HEPPP funding, universities' missions and values, and influential equity directors or other senior champions of widening participation.
- One case study had achieved transformational change, driven by a well-connected senior group working out of one organisational area, leveraging the introduction of a new course model and centralised admissions process and repositioning the equity agenda as a collective institutional endeavour.
- The absence of transformational change does not constitute failure. Given universities' different starting points in their efforts to improve low SES participation, organisational change should be seen as an indicator of the distance travelled since the launch of HEPPP.
- Short-term HEPPP funding arrangements created inefficiencies and reduced program performance, a problem which could be effectively addressed with the allocation of three-yearly budgets.
- Widening higher education participation is a systems issue requiring long-term funding, collaboration, and cross-institutional partnerships which should be enabled by Australia's national equity program.

## Conclusions and Considerations for Policy

### Recommendations for Policy Makers

- The Department of Education and Training (DET) should request universities to complete the Equity Initiatives Map with their annual progress report.
- The HEPPP reporting process should invite program level analysis and reflections over time by asking universities to provide an overarching narrative of its program's intent, structure, achievements and challenges.
- The Government should maintain stable policy settings with regard to demand-driven funding and HEPPP to continue the unprecedented improvements in equity group participation.
- If participation targets for students from low SES backgrounds were to be continued, the mechanisms for meaningfully connecting a national target to institutional level targets and desired program outcomes would need to be carefully considered and consistently enforced.
- HEPPP Guidelines should legitimise other equity groups to address compound disadvantage while the focus remains on poverty and the sociocultural disadvantage it creates. The definition of socioeconomic disadvantage could be extended to include the next quartile up, i.e. the bottom 26 to 50 per cent.
- The DET should develop an evaluation framework for HEPPP to enable the sector to systematically evaluate the influence of HEPPP funded initiatives on broadly defined student outcomes across the four main phases of the student life cycle.
- The Government should continue HEPPP funding at current levels and HEPPP must remain as a national program, with dedicated equity funding to all Australian universities and an explicit incentive to engage in cross-institutional partnerships.

### Recommendations for the Sector

- Universities should use the Equity Initiatives Map as a diagnostic tool to review their HEPPP programs and optimally align expenditure and effort with institutional priorities and needs.
- Universities should use the interpretive model to review their organisational and management approaches to HEPPP implementation and identify any factors which may further improve program effectiveness and efficiency.
- Staff delivering core outreach or retention activities should be paid out of operating funding or be employed as ongoing staff.

## Recommendations for Research

- Future research could include the analysis of the individual dimension of program implementation to more fully reflect the influence of individual equity practitioners, leaders and champions on the success of institutional HEPPP or other equity programs.
- The current review of the equity groups should develop a target group definition, or a blended model of group and individualised indicators, which is more accurate and user-friendly in targeting equity interventions at groups and individuals.

## Expert Commentary: Brenda Cherednichenko

### Pro Vice-Chancellor: Arts and Education Deakin University

Dr Zacharias has tackled one of the common questions associated with higher education funding: *does investment in increased participation result in improved educational and economic equity or is it just more money for universities?*

Investigating the experience and outcomes of the *Transforming Australia's Higher Education System* (2009) reform agenda, delivered through the Higher Education Participation and Partnerships Program, Dr Zacharias has uncovered the absolute importance of investment, the critical role each university has played as it responded to its community, and the enhanced capacity of universities to radically address the lack of participation from traditionally disadvantaged groups and indeed uncovered evidence of their success. This research reveals sustained and effective approaches to address educational inequity, principles to further inform universities as they establish, navigate and evaluate appropriate structures and practices for student success, and delivers essential data to inform future policy.

Dr Zacharias developed a rigorous framework for analysis, illustrated by three very different universities. Her findings are powerful. Universities embraced the challenge, invested wisely and shaped innovative and responsive programs which were designed for the specific needs of their communities. The outcomes are overwhelmingly positive and instructive. The research case studies demonstrate the authenticity of universities in engaging with disadvantaged communities and the success of strategic investment to address systemic disadvantage in education.

This report provides the Australian Government, universities and education systems with the evidence to inform and shape future policy and funding initiatives which build educational capital for all Australian people.

**FULL REPORT:** <https://www.ncsehe.edu.au/publications/the-australian-student-equity-programme-and-institutional-change-paradigm-shift-or-business-as-usual/>

# Biographies

## NCSEHE Contributors

### Sue Trinidad

Professor Sue Trinidad is the Director of the National Centre for Student Equity in Higher Education, hosted by Curtin University. An established scholar in the areas of higher education pedagogy and change management, the use of technology and student learning, Sue's research covers higher education and leadership including the use of technology for regional, rural and remote areas to provide equity access to all students regardless of their geographical location. Prior to becoming the NCSEHE's Director, Sue was Deputy PVC and Dean of Teaching and Learning in the Faculty of Humanities at Curtin during 2007-2012.

### John Phillipmore

Professor John Phillipmore is the Executive Director of the John Curtin Institute of Public Policy (JCIPP) at Curtin University and works on a range of public policy issues including federalism, higher education policy, public sector management, innovation and technology policy, and the Australian welfare state. John is NCSEHE Program Leader for Program 2 — Equity Policy and Research Program and he oversees the NCSEHE's Student Equity in Higher Education Research Grants Program.

### Paul Farnhill

Mr Paul Farnhill is an Economist and Policy Analyst with wide experience in policy issues in government and industry. Paul worked for the *Financial Times* newspaper in London before joining the Western Australian Government in a range of roles in economic development and policy analysis. He has also been a political speech writer and advisor to ministers and premiers.

## Researchers and Report Authors

### Kate Ala'i

Ms Kate Ala'i is a Senior Research Officer in the School of Education at Curtin University. She is part of an *Effective School Improvement* research project with a focus on fostering cultural and linguistic diversity in high schools in Australia, and has published in the areas of social justice, learning environments, identity, resilience, and interculturally inclusive schools. Her research interests combine an awareness of the social structures that empower or constrain human flourishing, together with an exploration of what it is good to be and how it is good to act.

### James Baglin

Dr James Baglin is a Senior Lecturer in Mathematical Science within the School of Science at RMIT University, and Program Manager for the Master of Analytics and Master of Statistics and Operations Research. James has won multiple teaching awards delivering online and blended postgraduate statistics courses. He is a full member of the SHEER Centre through which he collaborates with colleagues on nationally competitive learning and teaching grants, his primary research areas including educational technology, statistics education, data visualisation and biostatistics. James has extensive consulting experience in the application of advanced statistical methods.

### John Bahtsevanoglou

Mr John Bahtsevanoglou is an economist, researcher and lecturer at Swinburne University, as well as a lecturer in Economics and Business Studies at RMIT University. John has over

25 years of experience in telecommunications and industry regulation. His areas of work include market and industry assessment, pricing and cost analysis, resolution of industry disputes over interconnection and equal access and the development of the regulatory framework for the introduction of next generation network services in the communications sector.

### **Paul Barry**

Dr Paul Barry is a Policy Advisor in the Higher Education Policy unit at La Trobe University. He holds a Bachelor of Arts (Honours) and a PhD in Philosophy. Paul's research interests include the migration patterns of university students from non-metropolitan areas, the effects of low SES and regional status on student retention and completion, and the impact of growing wealth inequality on attitudes to the university sector in regional and low SES areas.

### **Susan Beltman**

Dr Susan Beltman is an Associate Professor in the School of Education at Curtin University. A former School Psychologist, her teaching areas include learning theories, development, mentoring and inclusive education. Susan's published work relates to motivation and role models in higher education and community settings, as well as professional identity and resilience of pre-service and early career teachers. Susan has been a project partner in locally, nationally and internationally funded projects related to teacher resilience and to mentoring. She is the current President and a Fellow of the Western Australian Institute for Educational Research (WAIER).

### **Anna Bennett**

Dr Anna Bennett is the Head of Research Engagement and Development within the English Language and Foundation Studies Centre at the University of Newcastle, New South Wales. Her areas of interest include: the study of discourses and experiences of access, participation and equity in higher education, equity program evaluation and enabling pedagogies. In addition to leading the *Critical Interventions Framework Part 2* (2015) and contributing the *Equity Initiatives Framework* as part of this work, Anna has been involved in various research projects, including two funded by the NCSEHE. Anna is the co-facilitator of the NAEER Research Development and Collaboration Special Interest Group.

### **Mark Bowden**

Mark Bowden is currently a Senior Lecturer in Economics with the Faculty of Business and Law at Swinburne University of Technology. He has degrees in Economics and Science (Applied Mathematics), a Masters of Social Science (Economics) and a PhD in Economics obtained at the University of Queensland. Mark's interests are in the areas of economics and sociology of education, and psychology of education (teaching and learning). He has published in a number of international journals. Prior to his career in academia he spent over 10 years in industry and government, predominantly in the energy sector.

### **Matthew Brett**

Matt Brett is an Equity Senior Research Fellow at La Trobe University and a 2017 NCSEHE Equity Fellow. He has 20 years of leadership and management experience in higher education, and in 2008 was awarded a Citation for outstanding contributions to student learning by the Australian Learning and Teaching Council. In 2011 he co-convened the National Summit on the Mental Health of Tertiary Students, and in 2016 he co-edited the *Student Equity in Australian Higher Education: 25 Years of A Fair Chance For All* publication. Recent research publications include a study of regional student participation and migration.

### **Matthew Bunn**

Dr Matthew Bunn is a Research Associate at the Centre of Excellence for Equity in Higher Education at the University of Newcastle. He is currently involved in a number of empirical qualitative studies exploring the relationship between, and equity and student experiences of, time and time management, as well as the equity issues in graduate outcomes for HE students from advantaged and disadvantaged backgrounds. He has a PhD in Sociology/ Anthropology that explores the way that alpine climbers develop communities around risky practices, and how these change the way that risks are perceived.

### **Penny Jane Burke**

Penny Jane Burke is Global Innovation Chair of Equity and Director of the CEEHE at the University of Newcastle. She has published extensively in the equity field including her books *Accessing Education: Effectively Widening Participation* (Burke, 2002), *Reconceptualising Lifelong Learning* (Burke and Jackson, 2007), and *The Right to Higher Education* (Burke, 2012). She is Editor of *Teaching in Higher Education* and was Professor of Education at Roehampton University and the University of Sussex, as well as Reader of Education at the Institute of Education, University of London.

### **Buly Cardak**

Buly Cardak is an Associate Professor of Economics in the Department of Economics and Finance at La Trobe University. He has worked on the equity and access implications of credit constraints on university participation and completion in Australia, the equity implications of Australian tertiary admissions processes and the differences between regional and metropolitan educational outcomes. Buly has also studied differences in outcomes between students from public and private schools. His research has been funded by the ARC, NCSEHE and DET National priorities Pool, published in leading international and Australian journals, is widely cited and has contributed to the policy debate on higher education in Australia.

### **David Carroll**

David Carroll is a Melbourne-based economist and researcher currently employed as a Strategic Information Analyst at Monash University, and formerly as a Research Fellow at the UWA School of Population Health. David has authored numerous papers on issues relating to higher education, some of which have been published in high-profile journals. David has presented papers at conferences across the globe and has collaborated with leading research and policy institutes, including the Grattan Institute and the National Institute of Labour Studies. David was awarded his PhD in Economics from UNSW in 2015.

### **Sue Clegg**

Sue Clegg is Emeritus Professor of Higher Education Research at Leeds Beckett University and a Visiting Professor at University of the Arts, London. She was a Mellon Visiting Scholar at the University of Cape Town in 2014 and a visiting professorial scholar at the University of Newcastle NSW in 2016. Her research draws on critical realism and feminist theory. She has written on temporality in higher education and is currently working on the significance of powerful knowledge in higher education and its implications for theorising equity and diversity. She was Editor of *Teaching in Higher Education* from 2006 to 2014.

### **Grant Cooper**

Dr Grant Cooper is a lecturer in the School of Education at RMIT University. His research publications are commonly positioned within psychosocial explanations of human behaviour and intentions. Grant's current research activities include the examination of STEM/Science pedagogies and practices, especially in relation to pre-service teachers and students' perceptions. He is also currently exploring equity across all sectors of education, and how



educational participation and outcomes can be improved in underrepresented groups (e.g. low SES status, Indigenous and regional and remote students).

### **Daniel Edwards**

Daniel Edwards is Research Director of the Tertiary Education Research Program at the Australian Council for Educational Research. He leads a team of researchers with a wide range of expertise in policy research, assessments and surveys. Dr Edwards's research encompasses a range of educational issues, with particular emphasis on higher education. He has explored issues relating to graduate and alumni outcomes, supply of, and demand for, higher education, student achievement, student aspirations and pathways, selection policies for entrance to university, assessment development and educational 'choice' theories.

### **Jack Frawley**

Dr Jack Frawley is an Academic Leader within the National Centre for Cultural Competency at the University of Sydney. Jack has approached his work in Aboriginal Australia and South East Asia from a social justice perspective within a range of educational contexts. He has been involved in the development of research and professional projects which have required negotiations and the establishment of collaborative partnerships with a number of national and international organisations. This has resulted in several successfully funded projects with organisations such as the NCSEHE, Australian Research Council (ARC), the Office of Learning and Teaching (OLT) and DFAT, amongst others.

### **Jenna Gillett-Swan**

Dr Jenna Gillett-Swan is a Senior Lecturer and Researcher at the Faculty of Education at QUT. Jenna specialises in qualitative participatory research methodologies and has investigated different aspects of how wellbeing is conceptualised and defined by students using a rights and social justice lens. She is a Senior Fellow of the Higher Education Academy and is the current school representative on the Faculty Equity Committee. Jenna received the 2016 Australian Teacher Education Association Research Recognition Award for Early Career Researchers, and the Executive Dean's Award for Excellence in Teaching and Learning. She is an active member of the SELB Research Group.

### **Deanna Grant-Smith**

Dr Deanna Grant-Smith is a Senior Lecturer at the QUT Business School. Her recent research has focused on the education-to-employment transitions of disadvantaged job seekers and early career professionals across a range of disciplines. In particular she has explored the challenges associated with unpaid work and internships, and student wellbeing in a Work Integrated Learning context. Deanna received the 2016 Australian and New Zealand Academy of Management Award for Early Career Researchers and is a Senior Fellow of the Higher Education Academy and member of the QUT Work/Industry Futures Research Program.

### **Andrew Gunstone**

Professor Andrew Gunstone is the inaugural Executive Director (Reconciliation Strategy and Leadership) and Professor of Indigenous Studies at Swinburne University. His research interests are in Indigenous studies, history, politics and education, specifically in stolen wages, reconciliation, reparative justice and higher education policies. He is the Foundation Editor of the *Journal of Australian Indigenous Issues*.

### **Steve Larkin**

Professor Steven Larkin is a Kungarakany and Yanyula man from Darwin, Australia. He currently holds the position of PVC for Indigenous Education and Research at the University

of Newcastle, prior to which he held the same position for Indigenous Leadership at Charles Darwin University. Steve's appointment at CDU in 2009 was historic, as he was the first ever Aboriginal person to be appointed to a Senior Executive position at an Australian university. Steve was also Director of the Australian Centre for Indigenous Knowledges and Education (ACIKE) at CDU. Professor Larkin holds a PhD from the Queensland University of Technology, a Master's degree in Social Science from Charles Sturt University and a Bachelor of Social Work from the University of Queensland. He has served on numerous national advisory committees in Indigenous Affairs.

### **Ian Li**

Dr Ian Li is an Economist based at the School of Population and Global Health at UWA. He has research interests in health, education and labour economics, including research into higher education equity issues and the graduate labour market. Ian's research has been funded by nationally competitive schemes, such as the NHMRC. He was Chief Investigator on a number of grants totalling AUD\$2.5 million between 2012 and 2016, and has published in respected journals in the economics, education and health disciplines. In 2015, Ian received the UWA Vice-Chancellor's Early Career Investigator award, in addition to six competitive teaching awards between 2010 and 2016.

### **Kerry Martin**

Kerry is the Director of the Strategic Information and Analysis Unit at the University of the Sunshine Coast. She has almost 25 years' experience in higher education with extensive experience in data analysis and a comprehensive knowledge of student data and reporting. Kerry is an executive member of the Australasian Association of Institutional Research (AAIR), a member of the Australian Network of University Planners (ANUP) and the Regional Universities Network (RUN) Planning Group. She has a particular interest in student success at regional universities, with a focus on attrition and graduate outcomes.

### **Richard McAllister**

Richard McAllister completed a Bachelor of Economics with Honours at La Trobe in 2014. He then worked with his previous thesis supervisors to turn his thesis into an academic journal. Richard has since worked as a Research Assistant in the School of Economics at La Trobe where he has worked in a range of areas. Richard has a particular interest in research on why people do not make economically rational choices.

### **Julie McMillan**

Dr Julie McMillan is a Senior Research Fellow at the Australian Council for Educational Research. She has worked extensively on the transitions of young people from school, as well as participation in, and pathways from, higher education. A common theme that runs through much of Dr McMillan's research has been the influence of socioeconomic status on a range of educational outcomes. In addition, she has developed measures of socioeconomic status which are widely used by researchers across a range of disciplines including education, economics and health.

### **Karen Nelson**

Professor Karen Nelson is responsible for developing the USC student experience and leading a range of initiatives to improve student success and retention. Her research focuses on student engagement and the first year in higher education. She has led a series of national projects which have produced a maturity model for student engagement and a social justice framework for higher education. In 2016, she led the project, *Shaping the 21st Century Student Experience in Regional Universities*. She has received three National Awards and is the Editor of the *Student Success Journal* and Co-Chair of the annual STARS Conference.

### **Robyn Ober**

Robyn Ober is a Mamu/Djirribal woman from the rainforest region of North Queensland. She is an Indigenous Research Fellow with the Batchelor Institute and is currently undertaking her PhD studies focusing on *Aboriginal English as an academic discourse*. Robyn has an extensive educational background, teaching in early childhood, primary and tertiary educational contexts all around Australia. She has a strong interest in both-ways education, educational leadership and Indigenous Australian languages. Robyn has undertaken several research projects focusing on these topics and has published papers in educational and linguistic journals, both nationally and internationally.

### **Millie Olcay**

Millie Olcay is a Research Fellow working within the School of Health and Social Development. Millie has spent the last 5 years in VET and higher education research across a number of remote Indigenous communities. She has worked as a Senior Lecturer and Project Manager at the Batchelor Institute, and was awarded the NT Training Initiative Award in 2013. She has held the position of Community Engagement Leader (West Arnhem) in the Office of the PVC – IL at Charles Darwin University, and was involved with the *Whole of Community Engagement* project, winner of the Australian Rural Education Award (AREA) in 2016. Millie is also an Honorary University Fellow with CDU.

### **Francisco (Paco) Perales**

Dr Francisco Perales is a Senior Research Fellow at the Life Course Centre (ISSR, The University of Queensland). His research revolves around the issues of gender, work and families, with a particular interest in the production and reproduction of gender inequalities. His work often relies on principles of the life-course approach and his methodological expertise is on the analysis of longitudinal survey data. Recently, he was awarded an ARC DECRA to undertake a project which will provide new systematic Australian evidence of social stratification by sexual orientation across a diversity of life domains.

### **Ekaterina (Katya) Pechenkina**

Dr Ekaterina Pechenkina is a Research Fellow at the Learning Transformations Unit, Swinburne University of Technology. Ekaterina holds a PhD in Cultural Anthropology from the University of Melbourne (2014) and several other degrees. She was a 2003-2004 International Research and Exchange Board fellow at the California State University Bakersfield, where she majored in Sociology. Ekaterina's research interests encompass the discourses of technology, innovation, teaching excellence and Indigenous experiences in higher education. Ekaterina has published widely and is currently peer reviewing for 12 major journals and conferences. She is a member of Australian and New Zealand mobile learning group anzMLearn.

### **Catherine Picton**

Dr Catherine Picton is a Research Fellow in the Office of the Pro Vice-Chancellor (Students) at USC. She has degrees in Arts and Education, and a PhD in Social Anthropology. Catherine is currently investigating the lived experience of first year university students at regional universities and the factors influencing their engagement. Her other research interests are in culture, disability and Pacific policy development.

### **Christine Robinson**

Christine was appointed PVC Vocational Education and Training at CDU in October 2015. She holds academic qualifications in Social Science, vocational qualifications in Training and Assessment and Management, and a Master of Education. She is a member of the Australian Institute of Company Directors, the Australian Vocational Education and Training Research Association, a Fellow of Leadership Victoria and a Board Member of TAFE

Directors Australia. Christine has extensive experience in workforce development through VET and has led the design and implementation of a range of innovative training partnerships.

### **Shamim Samani**

Dr Samani is a lecturer at the CUSP institute and a Research and Evaluation Officer at Curtin's Ethics Equity Social Justice unit. She completed her PhD at Curtin in 2010, has a Masters degree in Ecologically Sustainable Development and a Bachelors in Economics. She has worked on various research and equity projects including a collaborative OLT project across three universities looking at a holistic model for supervision of international students in engineering and information technology and the Addressing Higher Education Access Disadvantage (AHEAD) initiative at Curtin. She is also a Research Fellow at the Centre for Muslim States and Societies at UWA.

### **James A. Smith**

Associate Professor James Smith is a 2017 Equity Fellow with the NCSEHE hosted through the Office of PVC – Indigenous Leadership (OPVC-IL) at CDU. Prior to this role he was the Program Manager for the Whole of Community Engagement initiative within OPVC-IL. James has previously worked in a variety of Executive and Senior Management roles in both the health and education sectors and has developed a strong background in health promotion and community development. He is a Fellow of the AHPA and an Associate and Consulting Editor respectively of two major Australian journals. James is also an Adjunct Research Fellow with the CERIPH at Curtin University.

### **Erica Southgate**

Associate Professor Erica Southgate from the School of Education at the University of Newcastle, Australia has extensive experience in conducting qualitative, ethnographic and mixed method research on social disadvantage and marginalisation in the fields of health and education. Her most recent publications include an edited book, and a number of scholarly articles on access to high-status degrees for people who would be the first in their family to attend university. She is an app developer with an interest in the use of digital technology for learning and the pedagogies of immersive virtual reality.

### **Jacqueline Stevenson**

Professor Jacqueline Stevenson is Head of Research at the Sheffield Institute of Education, Sheffield Hallam University. She is a Sociologist of education with interests in equity, diversity and widening participation. Her research focuses on the differential higher education experiences of religious students, international students, refugees and students from minority ethnic backgrounds. She draws on the theoretical lenses of resilience, belonging, mattering, time, temporality and future selves. Her research is primarily qualitative, exploring biography, narrative inquiry and life history. She was previously Professor of Higher Education at Leeds Beckett University.

### **Cathy Stone**

Dr Cathy Stone is a Conjoint Senior Lecturer in Social Work with the School of Humanities and Social Science at the University of Newcastle, Australia. She was also a 2016 Equity Fellow with the NCSEHE, where she is currently a 2017 Visiting Research Fellow. Cathy has had many years' experience in developing and managing strategies to improve student success and retention in higher education, with her research and publications focusing mainly on the experiences of mature-age, first-in-family and online students. As a result of her previous work with Open Universities Australia Cathy has a particular interest in improving outcomes for online students, amongst whom there is such diversity of background and experience.

## **Rob Strathdee**

Rob Strathdee is the Dean of the College of Arts and Education at Victoria University, Melbourne. Prior to this, he was the Professor of Education and Head of the School of Education at RMIT University. He has also worked as Professor of Education and Head of the School of Education Policy and Implementation at Victoria University, Wellington, New Zealand. Rob's research, supervision and teaching interests are in education policy and sociology.

## **Wojtek Tomaszewski**

Dr Wojtek Tomaszewski is a Research Group Leader at the Institute for Social Science Research at UQ, and a Senior Research Fellow at the ARC Centre for Excellence. He holds a BSc and MSc in Mathematics, an MA in Sociology from the University of Warsaw, Poland and a PhD in Social Sciences from the European University Institute in Florence, Italy. Wojtek joined UQ from the National Centre for Social Research in London and has specialist expertise in quantitative research methods and advanced statistical analysis. He has undertaken a number of research projects for the British Government and for the State and Commonwealth Governments of Australia, and has published in a number of high-profile international journals.

## **Joseph Vecchi**

Joe Vecchi is currently a Post Doctoral Research Fellow in the Department of Economics at the University of Gothenburg, Sweden. Joe completed his PhD in 2016 at Monash University, Australia. His primary research interests are in the fields of development economics and economics of education. Within these fields he has two key research themes: i) gender equality, and ii) equity and access to education. He has published in journals such as *European Economic Review*, *Journal of Development Economics*, *Oxford Bulletin of Economics and Statistics* and *Economics of Education Review*.

## **Ning Xiang**

Dr Ning Xiang is an experienced researcher with a multi-disciplinary training background. She is a Research Assistant at the Institute for Social Science Research at the University of Queensland, and holds a PhD in Social Psychology. She has been working on the national evaluation of the *Australian Government's Paid Parental Leave (PPL)* scheme and the follow-up ARC Linkage project: *Millennium Mums Longitudinal Survey*. Her current research involves student engagement, gender equity in domestic work, childcare and maternal employment.

## **Nadine Zacharias**

Dr Nadine Zacharias is Senior Research Fellow at the NCSEHE and was an inaugural Equity Fellow in 2016. Nadine's research interests and expertise are at the intersection of equity research, practice and policy at institutional and national levels. She has led applied research projects in the fields of equity policy and program management, inclusive teaching and learning and gender equity in employment. Nadine was Director, Equity and Diversity at Deakin University from 2011 to 2016 where she led one of the most integrated and effective Equity teams in Australian higher education.

## **Expert Reviewers**

### **Lisa Andrewartha**

Lisa Andrewartha is Senior Research Officer and Senior Project Coordinator at the Centre for Higher Education Equity and Diversity Research at La Trobe University. Lisa has worked across a broad range of research projects designed to improve the access and achievement levels of students who are underrepresented in higher education. Lisa's recent research

publications have focused on: student equity and employability in higher education; care leavers in higher education; outcomes of tertiary enabling programs; and postgraduate student equity.

### **Brenda Cherednichenko**

Brenda is the Executive Dean of Arts and Education at Deakin University. Previously she was the PVC of Engagement, Equity and Indigenous at ECU, with her work focusing on educational equity and community-university partnerships. Brenda is a Fulbright Ambassador and Senior Scholar, Origin Foundation Board Director, and graduate of the Australian Institute of Company Directors. She was Chair of the ERA 2015 Review Evaluation Committee, Education and Human Society, and President of the Australian Council of Deans of Education.

### **Marcia Devlin**

Professor Marcia Devlin is Professor of Learning Enhancement and the Deputy Vice-Chancellor (Learning and Quality) at Federation University Australia. She provides executive leadership in learning and teaching, quality enhancement, student retention, the *Blended, On-Line and Digital (BOLD Learning™)* strategy and *Women in Leadership*. An advocate for the transformative role of higher education, she is recognised internationally for her expertise, having been appointed to a number of international roles. Marcia has published in a number of refereed outlets as well as in a range of media.

### **(Alfred) Michael Dockery**

Based at Curtin University, Associate Professor Alfred Michael Dockery is a Principal Research Fellow with the Bankwest Curtin Economic Centre and Principal Research Leader of the CRC. His research has focused on outcomes for marginalised groups within the labour market, the economics of education and training, the school-to-work transition, subjective-wellbeing (or 'happiness') and Indigenous socioeconomic outcomes. Mike has published extensively in national and international journals as well as a variety of book chapters and monographs.

### **Andrew Harvey**

Dr Andrew Harvey is Director of the Access and Achievement Research Unit at La Trobe University. He has a Bachelor of Arts (Honours) and a PhD in Politics. Andrew has published widely on higher education policy, addressing issues such as access, student retention, regionality and teacher education. He previously served as Director of Regional Operations at La Trobe and Executive Officer of the Australian Council of Deans of Education. Andrew's recent research publications have focused on early university offers to underrepresented students; achievement of students from Non-English speaking backgrounds; predictors of student attrition; postgraduate student equity; and outcomes of tertiary enabling programs.

### **Norma Jeffery**

NCSEHE Adjunct Professor Norma Jeffery has over 40 years of experience as an educator, including as the Chief Executive Officer of the Curriculum Council in Western Australia, and later a Senior Executive position with the Western Australian Department of Education with responsibility for policy, planning, and accountability for government schools. Seconded to Curtin University in 2009 to undertake research projects, her work encompasses equity and social inclusion issues for all years of schooling, with a particular focus on the impact of disadvantage on the transition from school to further education.

### **Paul Koshy**

Paul Koshy is a Research Fellow at the NCSEHE. He works within the Centre's Equity Policy and Research Program area, specifically looking at issues in higher education

participation and student equity data collections. His current research focus is on the socioeconomic determinants of higher education access, participation and performance, and the translation of research in this area into policy formation and reporting in Australian higher education.

### **Peter Noonan**

Peter Noonan of the Mitchell Institute at Victoria University has played a major role in shaping policy in Australia's education and training system. He has experience working as a policy adviser, senior executive and consultant to federal and state governments, universities, higher education providers and Technical and Further Education (TAFE) institutes. Peter has been instrumental to several major policy changes and reviews.

### **Andrew Norton**

Andrew Norton is the Higher Education Program Director at the Grattan Institute. Mr Norton is the author/co-author of many articles, reports and other publications on higher education issues. These include *Taking University Teaching Seriously*; *The Cash Nexus: How Teaching Funds Research in Australian Universities*; and the widely used reference report, *Mapping Australian Higher Education*. He has worked as a Ministerial Adviser and served on two government-appointed policy reviews. Andrew is an Honorary Fellow at the Centre for the Study of Higher Education at the University of Melbourne.

### **Sarah O'Shea**

Associate Professor Sarah O'Shea leads the Adult, Vocational and Higher Education discipline in the School of Education, Faculty of Social Sciences at the University of Wollongong. Sarah has over 20 years' experience teaching in universities as well as the VET and Adult Education sector and has published widely on issues related to educational access and equity. Since 2011, Sarah has focused her research on educational equity in higher education, most recently exploring the persistence and retention of students who are the first in their families to attend university. Sarah has received numerous awards for excellence in teaching and research.

### **Robyn Quin**

Robyn Quin is an Adjunct Professor at Curtin University, having previously held the position of Deputy Vice-Chancellor (Education). Prior to her time at Curtin, Robyn was Pro Vice-Chancellor at Edith Cowan University. She has had a career-long commitment to student equity and currently works for the National Centre for Student Equity in Higher Education as a researcher, writer and consultant. She has been the project leader on some major NCSEHE studies in Victoria and New South Wales. Her research interests and publications are in the fields of educational reform, communications and cultural studies.

### **Maria Raciti**

Dr Maria Raciti is an Associate Professor in Marketing in the School of Business at the University of the Sunshine Coast (USC). Maria is co-leader of USC Indigenous Studies Research theme and her research interests include services marketing, social marketing and higher education. She regularly publishes in quality refereed journals and has numerous refereed conference papers, five of which have received outstanding paper awards. Dr Raciti is an Aboriginal woman and was the first Indigenous PhD graduate from CQU, the inaugural USC OLT citation recipient and the inaugural Associate Dean (Learning and Teaching) in the USC Faculty of Arts and Business.

### **Ann Stewart**

Dr Ann Stewart is an Adjunct Fellow with the NCSEHE. She has held senior roles in education in New Zealand, the UK and Australia, spanning across the schools sector in



special, Aboriginal and higher education. Ann was Director of Equity at the University of Queensland for almost 12 years, following which she established her own consultancy. Prior to her retirement in March 2016, she was Head of Student Access, Equity and Diversity at the University of the Sunshine Coast. Among other significant achievements Ann established a world-first International Equity Benchmarking Project, initiated the Ally program at UQ, and has undertaken equity-related reviews at the universities of Melbourne, Tasmania and the Sunshine Coast.

## About the Centre

The National Centre for Student Equity in Higher Education began operation in 2008, hosted by the University of South Australia. In May 2013, Curtin University won the bid to take over the Centre and received funding to achieve its aim of informing public policy design and implementation and institutional practice, to improve higher education participation and success for marginalised and disadvantaged people.

The NCSEHE's objectives are:

- to be at the centre of public policy dialogue about equity in higher education
- to 'close the gap' between equity policy, research and practice by:
  - supporting and informing evaluation of current equity practice, with a particular focus on identifying good practice
  - identifying innovative approaches to equity through existing research and the development of a forward research program to fill gaps in knowledge
  - translating these learnings into practical advice for decision-makers and practitioners alike.

## Student Equity and Participation

The NCSEHE's key purpose is "to inform public policy design and implementation, and institutional practice, to improve higher education participation and success for marginalised and disadvantaged people."

In keeping with its purpose, the NCSEHE is connecting Commonwealth student equity policy with the activities of higher education institutions and national equity outcomes through its input into comparative assessment of institutional strategies, systemic assessments of policy achievements and assessments of national policy-making in view of this evidence. The Centre's focus is based on three programs of research activity.

1. Equity Policy and Program Evaluation  
The Centre is providing leadership and support in developing a national approach and resources to evaluate the impact of initiatives to increase participation of people from low SES backgrounds and other equity groups in higher education.
2. Equity Policy and Planning Research  
The Centre is furthering equity policy and planning in Australia, sharing knowledge and capabilities developed in Australia, and providing evidence on the impact of policy on equity outcomes in the system. By enabling national research and engagement on higher education policy and practice, the Centre ensures its research includes analysis of all student equity groups, including people from low SES, Indigenous, regional and remote communities, and people with disability.
3. Student Equity Data  
The Centre conducts analysis of higher education datasets from a student equity perspective. This encompasses:
  - compiling and analysing national equity data and survey data on student transition to higher education
  - managing a website that presents data on student equity performance in higher education; in particular, the mapping of higher education participation data in Australia
  - providing access to sources for data and data-driven research on equity policy and programs from around Australia and the world.

## Disclaimer

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